Qualitative Comparative Analysis

Lecture: Wednesday, 10.00–11.30 hrs
Tutorial: Wednesday, 11.30–13.00 hrs

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Course Description

This course introduces students to the research method of Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) and its application within the R software environment. This method has seen wide usage across the social sciences in recent years, including the political science subfields of public policy and comparative politics. Since its foundation by Charles Ragin in his seminal book *The Comparative Method* (1987), QCA has undergone a dynamic development that included the creation of several different variants (crisp-set, fuzzy-set, and multi-value QCA, among others), as well as the design and constant evolution of software packages to conduct the analytical procedure (fs/QCA, Tosmana, and respective R packages). Drawing on set theory and emphasizing causal complexity, QCA combines elements of both qualitative and quantitative research. The lecture part of the course provides a step-by-step introduction to the method and its foundations, aiming to enable participants to eventually conduct their own QCA analysis with their own data. Each lecture is complemented by a tutorial where exercises are solved, and concepts and methods are applied to empirical questions. For the practical application of QCA, participants will work within the R software environment ("RStudio" and the packages “QCA” and “SetMethods”), which will be introduced during the initial sessions. The course is based on the textbook *Qualitative Comparative Analysis: An Introduction to Research Design and Application* (Georgetown University Press, 2021), a preprint of which will be made available to all participants.
Learning Outcomes and Purposes

By completing this course, students will:
- become acquainted with the method of Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) and its recent developments
- be able to conduct their own QCA analysis with their own data
- learn about the R environment and be able to conduct their own QCA analysis with the relevant R packages
- write a term paper and practice their presentational and analytical skills

Workload / Credits

Upon successful completion of the course, students are awarded 3 credit points (ECTS). According to examination rules Art.12 (1), students must register for the course within the first four weeks of classes to be eligible to earn these credits.

Grading

Students will be graded based on the following assignments in accordance with the examination rules Art. 11 (5): Presentation (30%) and a Term Paper (70%).

Assessment Guidelines

For the term paper, the task is to replicate a published QCA study. This entails a paper of about 10 pages plus functioning R code. Towards mid-semester, you will be assigned a published article and its data. Your tasks are to do the following (detailed guidelines will be discussed throughout the course):

Part I (Summary)
- Summarize the study’s background and research question
- Provide a brief discussion of the theoretical reasoning given in the paper
- Summarize the analytical results of the paper

Part II (Reflection)
- Reflect upon the study’s stated aims and its research design decisions: highlight anything that is inconsistent, not properly justified, ambiguous, or that could have been done differently.
- Think about how the study could be improved (in terms of theory, alternative conditions, analytical steps, etc.) and spell this out.

Part III (Replication)
- Produce an R script that conducts a complete QCA analysis with the data you were given. This should aim to reach identical results as the published article.
- Highlight any consistencies, data that is not matching, or analytical steps that had to be done differently.
- Complement this with any additional steps you deem useful.
Deadlines
- Term paper submission: September 1, 2021.
- Papers and R code should be sent to patrick.mello@uni-erfurt.de.
- Papers sent after the deadline will be regarded as failed (5.0).

Literature
The course is based on chapters from the textbook *Qualitative Comparative Analysis: An Introduction to Research Design and Application* (Georgetown University Press, 2021). The book will be made available on Moodle. To successfully follow the course and to be able to complete the exercises, everyone should have read the assigned chapters before class. As background and for additional information, the final section of the syllabus indicates selected readings on specific topics.

Online Material
The applied part of QCA works with the R software environment. The second session of the course entails an introduction to R and RStudio (see the assigned reading). It is recommended that you go through the assigned reading before installing the software and trying to work with it. Once that is done, the best way to learn how to use the software and how to do some coding with R is probably through online platforms and exercises. On Moodle, there will be a dedicated folder with online material and links on enhance your learning of R. Keep in mind that R can be used for all kinds of purposes, beyond QCA. So, you will definitely benefit from learning the R programming language, even if you should not use QCA for some time.

Presentations
Each course participant takes part in a presentation, either individually or in a small group. While the course content is developed throughout the lectures, the presentations introduce the course participants to a range of diverse empirical applications of QCA. The final section of this syllabus contains a list of studies for you to choose from for your presentation.

Each presentation should address the following four areas: (1) What is the research topic of your selected article, what does it aim to do, and why is this relevant? (2) What is the research design of the chosen article? (3) What are the results of the article? Finally, (4) what do you find challenging or problematic about the article, what could have been improved? Presentations should not exceed 12 minutes.

Attendance
If you cannot avoid missing a class, please send an e-mail stating the reason for your absence to patrick.mello@uni-erfurt.de prior to the session in question.
**Academic Conduct**

Plagiarism is using others’ ideas and words without clearly acknowledging the source of that information. This includes citing written words as well as graphs and statistics without giving proper credit. Plagiarism is a form of academic dishonesty and will therefore not be tolerated. According to the examination rules Art. 17 (3) and the Code of Conduct that students signed at the start of their studies, plagiarism will result in the student failing (5.0) the course.

**Disability Services**

The Brandt School provides support for students with disabilities. If this situation applies to you, please contact publicpolicy@uni-erfurt.de and patrick.mello@uni-erfurt.de so that the necessary arrangements can be made.

**Schedule and Session Overview**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Session Overview</th>
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<tr>
<td>(1) April 14, 2021</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction to Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>During the first session, we will discuss course contents, learning aims, criteria for assessment, and a brief introduction to QCA and its strengths and requirements, something on which we will continue in the following week.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mandatory Reading:</strong></td>
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| (2) April 21, 2021 |
| **Introduction to QCA with R** |
| **Mandatory Reading:** |

| (3) April 28, 2021 |
| **Research Design** |
| **Mandatory Reading:** |
(4) May 5, 2021

**Set Theory**

*Mandatory Reading:*

(5) May 12, 2021

**Causation and Causal Complexity**

*Mandatory Reading:*

May 19, 2021

**No Session**

(6) May 26, 2021

**Guest Talk**

*Mandatory Reading:*
To be announced.

(7) June 2, 2021

**Calibrating Sets**

*Mandatory Reading:*

(8) June 9, 2021

**Measures of Fit**

*Mandatory Reading:*

(9) June 16, 2021

**Set-Theoretic Analysis (Part I)**

*Mandatory Reading:*


(10) June 23, 2021

**Guest Talk**

*Mandatory Reading:*

To be announced.

(11) June 30, 2021

**Set-Theoretic Analysis (Part II)**

*Mandatory Reading:*


(12) July 7, 2021

**QCA and Its Critics**

*Mandatory Reading:*


(13) July 14, 2021

**Guiding Principles for QCA Research**

*Mandatory Reading:*

Additional Readings

Below is a list of recommended readings on specific topics, from general introductions to specific issue areas related to QCA. If you seek guidance on something that is not covered here, please just let me know.

Textbooks


Short Guide to Avoid Errors


QCA with R


Research Design


Multi-Method Research with QCA


**Standards of Good Practice**


**Variants of QCA**


**Online Resources**

The scientific network “Comparative Methods for Systematic Cross-Case Analysis” (COMPASSS) provides information about software, applications, and a QCA-related newsletter, among other resources:

http://www.compassss.org

**List of Articles to Select for Presentations**

Below you can find selected QCA applications from various fields of study in the social sciences (listed in alphabetical order). For your presentation groups, please let me know about your first and second choice and I’ll assign the articles on a first-come, first-served basis. The PDFs are available in a separate folder on Moodle, so please feel free to explore them before making your choice.


