RESEARCH CLINIC

General information

Supervisor:	Kristin Makszin
Title of clinic:	Text as data: Analyzing politics in sovereign credit rating reports
Number of students:	Up to 5
Major *(if applicable and approved by the Major Convener)*:	GED
(Pre)requisites *(if applicable)*:	QRM or knowledge of programming in R or Python

Research context

This project investigates the political influence of allegedly apolitical organizations: credit rating agencies. These agencies issue ratings that evaluate the country's ability to repay its debt. For international investors and other actors, these ratings have become a measure of the health of an economy and have influence far beyond their official stated purpose. This project draws on a vast resource of underutilized data with the potential to shed light on these seemingly opaque decision-making processes: official reports from credit rating agencies. As a team, we will compare and assess alternative approaches to processing this vast amount of text systematically, including quantitative text analysis and qualitative coding of texts. The aim is to assess alternative tools for measuring and analyzing the role of politics in CRAs' decision-making by contrasting quantitative topic modeling with qualitative thematic coding of texts.

Students' tasks and activities

The research clinic will begin with a few workshops on text analysis, including qualitative and quantitative approaches. The participants will then be expected to do some self-teaching of topic modeling (a quantitative text analysis method) using R and/or Python, using provided resources. Participants will conduct a qualitative thematic coding of the texts, which are credit rating agency reports (in English). They will also assist with a quantitative topic modeling analysis.
Participants will be expected to be comfortable with regression analysis and will receive experience and training in how to compare and contrast different methods. Depending on participants' skills, we may also conduct a web scraping analysis of references to credit rating decisions in media. The output of the research clinic will be a paper evaluating three alternative approaches to text analysis: qualitative, quantitative, and a mixed approach.

Division of hours will be approximately:
Methods training 25 hours
Reading and literature review 25 hours
Qualitative coding of texts 40 hours
Work on quantitative models 40 hours
Team meetings 10 hours