

PP5001: Causal Inference for Policy Analysis

Policy Critique

Martinmas 2026

Length: 2,000 words

Proposal due: Monday, 26 October, 12 noon (Week 7), by email

Final assignment due: Friday, 13 November, 12 noon (Week 9), on Moodle

The assignment

Evaluate a body of research centred on **3–4 core papers or reports estimating the causal effect(s) of a policy**. Choose a policy question that interests you and select the studies yourself, subject to agreement with the instructor.

Your critique should address the central question:

What does this body of evidence allow you to recommend about the policy?

Draw on the methods and concepts covered in the module to assess how convincingly the studies identify causal effects, explain their findings, and develop a policy recommendation.

Choosing your question and studies

Choose a focused question that you can examine in sufficient depth within 2,000 words. Your studies should address a common policy question and provide opportunities to compare findings, methods, populations, or settings. Published articles, working papers, and research reports are all eligible. The critique should focus on three or four core studies. Read more widely to select these studies, place their findings in context, and consider contrary evidence. You may cite additional sources for these purposes.

By **Monday, 26 October at 12 noon**, email me a short paragraph explaining your proposed policy question, together with full references and links for your proposed 3–4 core studies, for approval. Use the subject line **PP5001 Policy Critique proposal**.

In the final critique, briefly explain how you selected the studies and how you searched for evidence that might challenge your conclusions.

What your critique should cover

- **The policy question.** Explain the question, why it matters, and the outcomes the research examines.
- **Identification.** Explain the empirical approaches and the assumptions needed to interpret the estimates causally. Assess how plausible those assumptions are in each setting and what evidence the authors provide to support them.
- **Findings.** Interpret the principal estimates, their units, their substantive importance, and their uncertainty. Consider contrary evidence and possible selective reporting.
- **Comparison across studies.** Explain why findings agree or differ. Consider differences in research design, implementation, populations, outcomes, and follow-up periods.

- **Credibility and applicability.** Assess whether the findings support the authors' claims. Discuss external validity explicitly: to which populations, settings and versions of the policy might the findings apply, and what limits their generalisability? Explain how those limits affect your policy recommendation.
- **Your recommendation.** State what policy action the evidence supports, explain your reasoning, and identify consequential uncertainties. A recommendation may be conditional on the setting or on obtaining further evidence.

Organize the critique around the questions and comparisons that matter for your argument. Use specific evidence from the studies, including results reported in their main tables or figures, to support your assessment.

Marking criteria

Your critique will be assessed using the following criteria and weights:

- **Policy question and selection of evidence (10%).** A focused, relevant question and a justified selection of studies, including attention to contrary evidence.
- **Identification and credibility (30%).** Accurate explanation of the methods and a convincing assessment of the identifying assumptions in each setting.
- **Interpretation and synthesis (30%).** Correct interpretation of effect sizes and uncertainty, and thoughtful explanations of agreement or disagreement across studies.
- **Policy recommendation (20%).** A recommendation supported by the evidence, with explicit attention to external validity, limitations and unresolved uncertainty.
- **Clarity and presentation (10%).** A coherent argument, effective use of evidence, clear writing and accurate referencing.

Strong critiques explain which evidence deserves greater weight and why, and show how that judgement informs the policy recommendation.

Presentation

Write clearly and concisely. Define technical terms when you introduce them, but do not regurgitate standard definitions of estimators. Any tables or figures you include should have informative titles, labels, and source notes. Create your own tables to synthesise evidence across studies. Do not reproduce tables from the original studies. You may reproduce a figure where it is directly relevant to your argument, provided you identify its source and discuss what it shows and how it informs your assessment. Give full references for the studies and cite the sources of factual claims, quotations, tables, and figures. Above all, respect your reader's time.

AI declaration

Include an AI declaration describing whether and how you used Claude or another generative AI tool. If you used one, identify the tool, explain what you used it for, and describe how you checked its contributions. If you did not use generative AI, state that.

You are responsible for the accuracy of the references, interpretation of the research, and conclusions in your submission.