



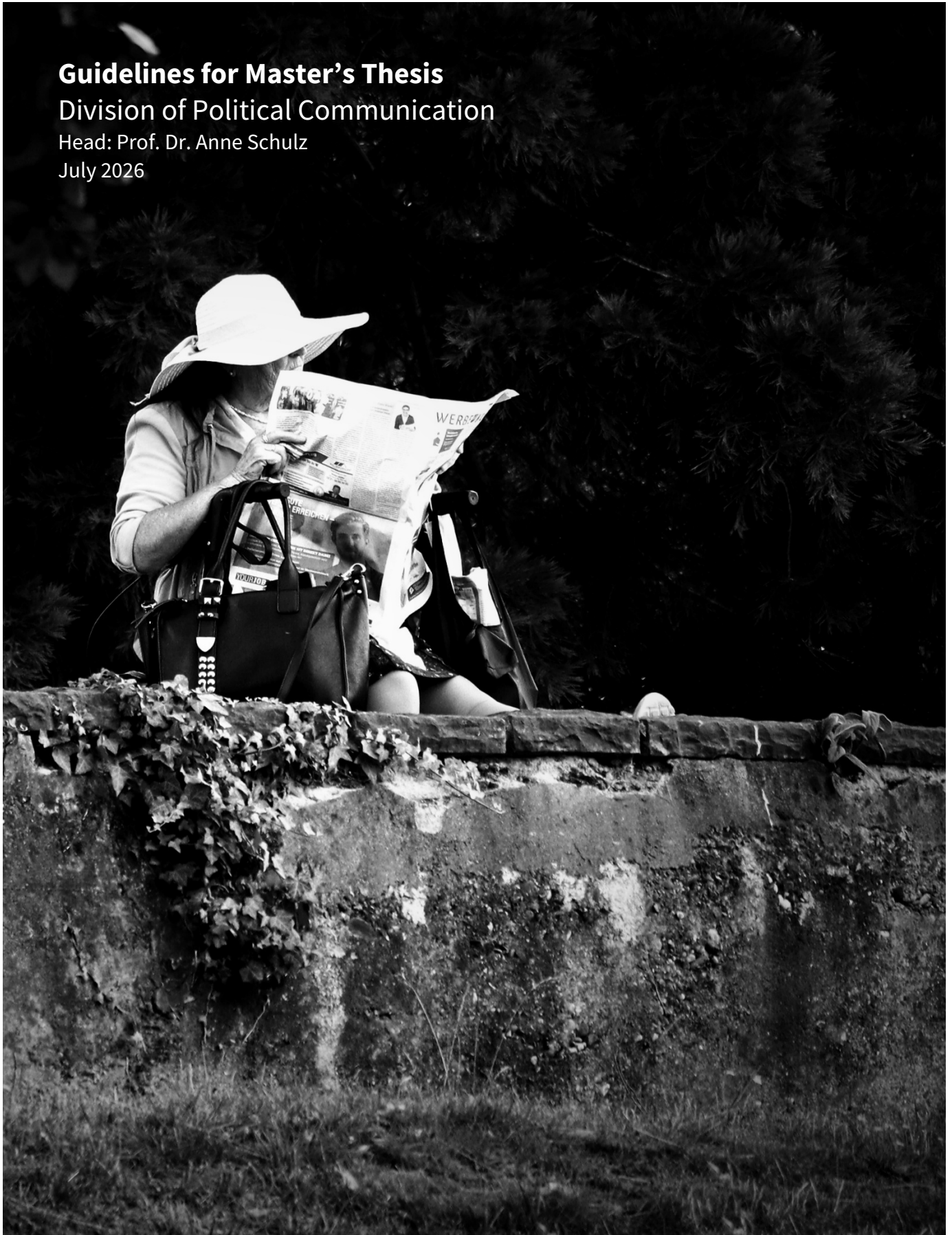
**Universität
Zürich**^{UZH}

Department of Communication
and Media Research (IKMZ)

Guidelines for Master's Thesis

Division of Political Communication

Head: Prof. Dr. Anne Schulz
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Introduction

If you are interested in writing your Master's thesis in the field of political communication, we would be happy to supervise your project.

Political communication is a broad and dynamic field of research. Within our division, we primarily work on topics related to **news audiences** (e.g., news use and news avoidance, news abundance, news literacy, and AI in news), **populist communication**, and **political participation**. At the same time, we are happy to supervise projects beyond these areas, provided they address a relevant question within the field of political communication.

Most of the Master's theses we supervise are empirical and employ quantitative methods. However, we also welcome qualitative research as well as theoretical theses. The most important criterion is that the chosen research design is appropriate for the research question and can be carried out successfully within the scope of a Master's thesis.

We hope this guide provides a useful orientation throughout your thesis. Remember that the thesis is your own independent research project, and that the supervision process is designed to support—not replace—your own decisions and ideas. We look forward to working with you and wish you every success with your Master's thesis.

Acknowledgement: This guide builds on the "Guidelines for Master's Theses" (Division of Media Psychology & Methods, IKMZ, University of Zurich, Version 2025-10-06) and has been substantially adapted for the Political Communication Division.

Registration Procedure

Requirements

To complete your Master's degree, you must successfully complete the compulsory module Master's thesis (30 ECTS ; workload: 900 hours) as well as the corresponding Master's colloquium (6 ECTS). Please check [IKMZ department website](#).

Preliminary meetings of all divisions

The process begins with the preliminary meetings of all divisions, which usually take place toward the end of each semester. You will learn more about research focus areas, possible thesis topics, and potential supervisors. You can attend the meetings of all divisions.

Submitting a master thesis concept

After the preliminary meeting, you will prepare a Master's thesis proposal and submit it via the online form. The deadlines for submission are usually in June for a start in the autumn semester and in January for a start in the spring semester.

Allocation of supervision

Based on your topic, priorities, and the available capacities, proposals are distributed among all eligible supervisors. Your thesis might be supervised either by Prof. Anne Schulz or one of the current post-doctoral researchers. Once the allocation is completed, you will be contacted by our division, to confirm that we will supervise your thesis.

First one-on-one meeting

We will then schedule a 30-minute meeting (either in person or online) to get to know each other and discuss your thesis idea. Please prepare a short overview of the project in your own words (no slides). If you are still deciding between different ideas, you are welcome to present up to three possible topics. Please address the following questions:

- What is your **overarching research question**?
- Which **theoretical framework(s)** will guide your study?
- Which **methodological approach** do you currently envision?

If you are unsure and have multiple ideas, you may propose up to three topics. In general, however, the more concrete and focused, the better. One topic is entirely sufficient. Choose a topic that genuinely interests you. What do you want to find out? What fascinates you? What do you discuss with your friends?

At this stage, your ideas do not need to be fully developed. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss and refine your project together.

Registration

After the first meeting, you have to **formally register your Master's thesis**. Information on the registration procedure can be found on the Faculty and IKMZ websites. To graduate in the autumn semester, registration must be completed in March. To graduate in the spring semester, registration must be completed in October.

Master's colloquium

The Master's colloquium accompanies you throughout the thesis process. Its purpose is to provide structured feedback on your project, discuss theoretical and methodological questions, and foster exchange and peer learning throughout the research process. There are three sessions in total (outlined below). You will attend two colloquium sessions during the first semester of your thesis and one session during the second semester.

The Master's colloquium follows an **overlapping cohort model**. Each colloquium brings together students at different stages of the Master's thesis process. While some students are just beginning to develop their research ideas, others are already collecting data, analysing results, or writing their thesis. This allows students to learn not only from the supervisors, but also from one another. Students at an earlier stage benefit from seeing how a thesis project develops over time, while students further along in the process have the opportunity to receive feedback on their progress, and share experiences that may help their peers.

Registration: Students **register for the Master's colloquium** only in the first semester of their thesis. This registration includes participation in all three colloquium sessions. Students are expected to return for the third session in the second semester of their thesis.

1st colloquium session (first semester)

Guiding question: Is this a relevant research project?

Presentation: In the first colloquium session, each student will give a 10–15-minute presentation of their initial thesis idea. The presentation should focus on:

- the research question;
- why the topic is relevant, both societally and academically (and specifically within political communication research);
- the theoretical framework;
- the planned methodological approach; and
- the main challenges or open questions for which you would like feedback.

Handout 01: To facilitate discussion, please complete **Handout 01**, which will be provided by your supervisor. They can also be downloaded here: <https://www.ikmz.uzh.ch/en/research/divisions/political-communication/teaching.html>

Submit the completed handout to your main supervisor no later than one week before the colloquium. It will be shared with all participants, including your peers and members of the Political Communication Division, to allow everyone to prepare constructive feedback.

Peer Feedback: Prior to the colloquium, each student will be assigned one peer's project. Please read the peer's handout carefully and prepare a brief feedback statement (approximately 3–5 minutes). Your feedback should highlight:

- the project's main strengths,
- aspects that require clarification,
- constructive suggestions for further development.

2nd colloquium session (first semester)

Guiding question: Is the research design theoretically sound and methodologically feasible?

Presentation: By the second colloquium session, your project should have developed into a coherent research design. Rather than presenting the general idea again, the focus should now be on demonstrating that the project is theoretically grounded and methodologically feasible. In a 10–15-minute presentation, please discuss:

- your refined research question;
- your theoretical framework and key literature;
- your hypotheses (where applicable);
- the method (research design, planned data collection, and analytical strategy)
- the operationalization of your key concepts; and
- any remaining challenges or decisions for which you would appreciate feedback.

Please also indicate whether your project is likely to require **ethics approval** so that we can discuss the next steps and plan accordingly.

Handout 02: Please complete Handout 02 and submit it to your supervisor one week before the colloquium. As before, the handout will be shared with all participants to facilitate discussion.

Peer Feedback: Prior to the colloquium, each student will be assigned one peer's project. Please read the peer's handout carefully and prepare a brief feedback statement (approximately 3–5 minutes). Your feedback should highlight:

- the project's main strengths,
- aspects that require clarification,
- constructive suggestions for further development.

3rd colloquium session (second semester)

Guiding question: What has worked well, what has changed, and what remains to be done?

Presentation: Students in the second semester of their Master's thesis will give a 10–15-minute presentation on the current state of their project. Rather than introducing the research idea, the presentation should focus on how the project has developed since the first semester, the key decisions that have been made, and the experiences gained during the research process.

Students could address questions such as:

- Has your research question changed? If so, why?
- How did you operationalise your key concepts?
- How did data collection or data access work out in practice?
- Did you encounter unexpected methodological or practical challenges?
- What are your preliminary findings or observations (if available)?
- What would you do differently if you were starting the project today?

- What advice would you give students who are just beginning their Master's thesis?

Students in the first semester are encouraged to ask questions about the research process, methodological decisions, and practical aspects of conducting a Master's thesis.

Handout: The third session does not work with a handout.

Peer Feedback: The third session does not include formally assigned peer feedback. Instead, the discussion is intended to facilitate exchange between students at different stages of the thesis process.

One-on-one Meetings with the Supervisor

In addition to the Master's colloquium, your thesis will be supported through individual supervision meetings with your main supervisor. These meetings provide an opportunity to discuss your project in greater depth, receive tailored feedback, and address any questions that arise throughout the research process.

Following the initial meeting (outlined above), we will schedule at least two additional one-on-one meetings during the first semester of your thesis:

- **Meeting 2 (before the first colloquium):** This meeting focuses on refining your research question, theoretical framework, and overall project idea in preparation for the first colloquium.
- **Meeting 3 (before the second colloquium):** By this stage, your project should have developed into a coherent research design. We will discuss your theoretical framework, hypotheses (where applicable), operationalisation, and methodological approach in preparation for the second colloquium.

These meetings typically last **60 minutes**. To allow sufficient time for preparation, please send all relevant materials (e.g., drafts, handouts, or specific questions) to your supervisor **at least one week before the meeting**.

The supervision process is designed to provide a clear structure throughout your Master's thesis. At the same time, we recognize that projects develop at different speeds and that individual needs may vary. Additional meetings can therefore be arranged whenever necessary. You are also welcome to contact your supervisor by email at any stage of the project. We encourage you to reach out early whenever questions or challenges arise, rather than waiting until the next scheduled meeting.

What you can expect from us: We will provide timely feedback on agreed-upon materials, help you refine your research design, discuss theoretical and methodological questions, and support you in overcoming challenges during the research process. At the same time, the Master's thesis is an independent piece of academic work. Decisions regarding the project ultimately remain your responsibility.

Written Output 1st Semester: Your Exposé

The task for the first semester is to prepare a Master's thesis proposal. The proposal helps you think through the relevance of your research, the theoretical background, the method, and the analysis before you begin actual data collection and in-depth writing. This allows you to identify and address potential issues at an early stage.

The purpose of the exposé is not to produce a perfect document, but to develop a coherent and feasible research design before beginning data collection. It should not exceed **20 pages** (excluding references and any appendices). Format it in the same way as your final thesis (see criteria below). It should include the following sections:

- Introduction
 - Overarching research question.
 - Justification of the (scientific and practical) relevance of the thesis.
- Theoretical Background
 - Which concepts will you study? Define them.
 - Which theories or approaches can explain the phenomenon?
 - Summarize and reference relevant or related studies on the topic.
 - If you have or can derive hypotheses, present them ("A leads to B").
 - If not, formulate open research questions ("Does A lead to B?").
- Method Planned study design and procedure.
 - Planned sampling method and sample size.
 - Planned measurement instruments.
 - Planned analysis strategy.
- Timeline
- References
- Appendices
 - For example: items of measurement instruments, draft questionnaire, interview guide, coding scheme, etc.

You may reuse any content from your proposal directly in the thesis. The work you put into the proposal is therefore never wasted. It is also possible to modify what was written in the proposal for the final master's thesis.

Written Output 2nd Semester: Your Master's thesis

To follow.

Evaluation Criteria

To follow.