

Research Statement

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My research interests lie in the areas of Applied Microeconomics, Political Economy, Migration, and Economic History. My dissertation comprises two parts. In the first part, I focus on one of the largest mass migrations episodes in modern history, investigating how pioneers' migration and location decisions at destination affect prospective migrants from the same communities of origin (Job Market Paper), and how network size affects further migrants' selection patterns at the sub-national level and by cohort. In the second part, I investigate the effects of political regimes in Latin America on the formation of democratic beliefs and preferences in the long run. My research agenda involves applying rigorous research designs to assess the effects of non-democratic regimes in different outcomes in the long run, to further investigate the drivers of political preferences, and to understand how early migrants' location decisions affect outcomes of later-wave migrants and of origin communities.

PhD dissertation

In **'Italian Migration to the United States: The Role of Pioneers' Locations'** (Job Market Paper), I investigate the effect of early migrants' flow size and location decisions at destination on migration and settlement decisions of subsequent migrants from the same communities of origin. Filling a gap in the historical data, I focus on Italian mass migration to the US at the turn of the twentieth century and combine new data sets with a surname matching technique to generate new estimates of the yearly migratory flow from each Italian municipality to each US county. The empirical strategy exploits variation across time, origin municipalities, and destination counties and uses an instrumental variables approach. I find that municipalities connected to counties with a one standard deviation higher income displayed an 2.3 per-thousand increase in migration rates to the US later on. Moreover, given a one standard deviation increase in county income, a one standard deviation increase in the concentration of early migrants from a given municipality on that same county increases the probability for subsequent migrants from the same origin to migrate to that county by 0.028 percentage points, and reduces their concentration there by 7.8 percentage points.

In **‘Italian Migration to the United States: The Role of Migrant Networks’**, I investigate the effect of network size on literacy levels of Italian migrants to the US at the turn of the twentieth century. I exploit barely used ship manifest micro data and reconstruct migratory flows to the US by municipality of origin. This allows me to evaluate self-selection patterns at the sub-national level and by cohort, which shows positive selection for the lower tail of the literacy distribution. I exploit cross-sectional variation in the size of the migrant stock across municipalities of origin, and use instrumental variables to assess measurement error. I find that increased migrant network size by municipality of origin is associated with a reduction in literacy for later migrants. Moreover, larger network size is also associated with lower immigrant age, and a higher proportion of women and agricultural workers in subsequent migratory flows. Results are consistent with migrant networks reducing migration costs and increasing emigration rates for lower quality (prospective) migrants.

In **‘Do dictatorships affect people’s long term beliefs and preferences? An empirical assessment of the Latin American case’** (Revise & Resubmit, **Journal of Development Economics**), I investigate if the political regime experienced during youth has long lasting effects on political beliefs and preferences later on. I exploit time and country variation in political regimes in Latin America using data from the 1995 to 2010 Latinobarometer and find that exposure to non-democratic regimes during youth reduces subsequent preference for democracy, satisfaction with democracy and confidence in institutions. These results suggest exposure to dictatorships during formative years permanently eroded democratic values. Exposure to non-democratic regimes also affects self-location in an ideology scale, reducing identification with the Right and increasing identification with the Left; which suggests dictatorships also shaped the political orientation of voters.

Research Agenda

The first part of my research agenda involves extending my work in the field of migration. In an ongoing project, I extend my job market paper to study later-wave migrants’ outcomes in the United States, and the impact of migration on origin communities. In particular, I focus on how variation in local economic conditions experienced by early migrants affects later-wave migrants’ marriage decisions, family size, and other outcomes at destination, and population growth, literacy levels and other measures of local development at origin.

The second part extends the analysis of political economy aspects in the context of Latin America, in three directions. First, in an ongoing project with coauthors Ines Berniell (Universidad Nacional de La Plata) and Lucila Berniell (CAF), we study whether exposure to military dictatorship in Argentina affected human capital accumulation. After the 1976 coup, the military junta tortured, kidnapped and murdered university students and professors across the country. This could have reduced college enrolment and completion and thus employment rates and wages in the long run, especially so for women. We use census data and a regression discontinuity design exploiting variation in exposure to university intervention by the military by cohort to study its effects.

Second, in joint work with Gabriel Katz (University of Exeter), we use Latinobarometer data to assess the drivers behind the shift to left-wing governments experienced in Latin America in the last decades. This so-called Pink Tide has been addressed by the political science literature as resulting both from short-run sudden shocks to public opinion and long-run structural demographic changes of the electorate. We use the Oaxaca-Blinder methodology to quantify the relative importance of each element, decomposing the changes in ideological preferences of the electorate between the last election won by a right-wing party and the first one won by a left-wing one.

Third, together with Rodrigo Ceni (Universidad de la Republica) and Rodrigo Gorga (Queen Mary, University of London), we recently started a project to study how informing bureaucrats in charge of public procurement purchases about outliers in their expenses (e.g. over-pricing) affects their subsequent behaviour. We recently partnered with a uruguayan NGO with access to detailed public procurement information and applied for funding (decision pending) for an experimental study.

Finally, my research agenda also extends beyond migration and political economy. In an ongoing project with Guillermo Alves (CAF) linked to the literature on discrimination, we study the effects of economic incentives on mothers' naming patterns for newborn children. A small literature within economics has shown that some first names can be penalized in the labour market and are associated with historically discriminated or low socioeconomic status groups. In this project we use a regression discontinuity design exploiting eligibility criteria for a welfare program in Uruguay that targets very poor households, and investigate whether greater income and improved future prospects stemming from participation in the program affects the probability for newborn children of having a distinctively 'poor' name.