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Research Statement

My research interests lie at the intersection of development, political economy, and economic history. I aim to understand the consequences of historical events in developing countries. The questions that guide my research include: Can history explain why some policy interventions are not effective? What are the long-run consequences of national policies such as agrarian reforms? What are the developmental implications of historical interventions? How do political institutions shape the behavior of patronage and/or populist governments in developing countries? To answer these questions, I use novel datasets constructed from historical or understudied sources such as maps, reports, and texts. With these data, I employ causal inference and econometric techniques to address questions relevant to the economics profession.

My job market paper, **"The Long-Run Effects of Public Land Settlement Policies: Evidence from Ecuador's Agrarian Reform"**, makes important contributions. From an economic perspective, I explore the impact of land intervention through the lens of property rights. The paper examines Ecuador's allocation of land through expropriations and public land transfers (also known as land colonizations), implemented within a two-decade agrarian reform project, starting in the 1960s. I argue that comparing these two land allocation methods is equivalent to comparing different legal frameworks that granted varying property rights to beneficiaries. Farmers receiving land via public transfers had flexibility in crop choice, whereas those under expropriation legislation were mandated to cultivate rice due to government food security concerns at the time. Additionally, the paper includes cases where agrarian reform did not intervene, providing a contrast to assess the performance of each type of reform against a non-intervention scenario.

I digitize and georeference data from historical maps created by the governmental agency responsible for land reform. These maps reveal the objectives of the agency's bureaucracy during the agrarian reform process. I combine this information with data from the agency's archives to lay the groundwork for applying a geographic regression discontinuity model, aimed at uncovering causal effects. My identification strategy hinges on the plausibility that former cocoa haciendas, abandoned by their owners after the early 20th-century cocoa boom, were quasi-randomly allocated under either public land transfer or expropriation legislation. I demonstrate that the public land transfer program, compared to expropriation, increases productivity in perennial crops. This effect is particularly evident outside the country's traditional crops of bananas and cocoa. Conversely, the constraint on rice cultivation persists. I argue that this persistence is due to a private enforcement mechanism. Informal credit appears to be a novel (though not unique) mechanism that compels farmers to focus on short-term crops such as rice. As implications, I show that areas impacted by public land transfers exhibit better development indicators, such as increased night light intensity and rapid structural transformation.

The broad topic of agrarian reform in Ecuador has opened new research opportunities. For future research, I am exploring the effects of agrarian reform on child stunting. Before starting my PhD, I worked as a consultant at the World Bank and co-authored a published report on stunting in the country. Public policy interventions have rarely improved stunting rates in Ecuador. I am currently working on a paper called **"Can Agrarian Reform Cause Stunting?"**. This research aims to investigate whether there is a relationship between agrarian reform and the prevalence of stunting. Initial evidence suggests differences in stunting rates between areas that received public land transfers and those affected by expropriation.

Along with Daniel Baquero (a PhD student in politics at NYU) and Alex Rivadeneira (from Banco de Mexico), we have been examining the relationship between agrarian reform and an old labor coercive institution in Ecuador known as "Concertaje." Concertaje bound people to the land through labor debt, and one of the many objectives of the agrarian reform was to abolish this coercive institution. We are currently trying to understand the labor market implications of abolishing Concertaje and introducing more labor competition.

Very recently, Together with Daniel Baquero, we applied for funding for a project aimed at understanding the improvements in education gender gaps in Ecuador since 1946. That year, a new constitution was approved, which significantly promoted private education in the country. Interestingly, nearly 50 years earlier, a "liberal" government had already promoted education independent of religious beliefs. However, this earlier effort did not significantly impact female education, as gender gaps in education remained similar until the increase in educational supply due to the 1946 constitution. We have acquired new raw data from school censuses dating back to the late 19th century, which now needs to be digitized. This data will allow us to further explore why the separation of church and state was less effective in closing the gender gap in education compared to the increase in educational supply prompted by the 1946 constitution.

In my research on political economy, I am particularly interested in understanding contemporary populism in developing countries. In my paper "**Populism and Distributive Politics**", I study a distributive politics strategy during a period of significant institutional reform in a developing country. This strategy can be explained by repression incidents and the spread of local information, but only through the lens of the initial populist vote share. I focus on the populist period in Ecuador under Rafael Correa's regime. By exploiting differences in distances between repression episodes from 1984-1988 and local schools, and using this as an instrument for Correa's 2006 vote share, I find that the geographic allocation of bureaucrats in 2010 is explained by Correa's 2006 vote share. This result is significant given the substantial political changes occurring in the country during this period. It appears that exposure to repression episodes at a young age consolidates the populist vote share. For future work on this topic, I am training to use machine learning techniques to analyze text data from Correa's weekly speeches. This will further enhance my understanding of populism and its impact on distributive politics in developing countries.

My future goal is to continue researching how historical episodes impact various long-term outcomes. Additionally, I aim to further explore populism from a political economy perspective using different methods. Based on my current research agenda, I plan to spend the next year finalizing developed projects and collecting data for new ones. I believe this agenda is promising and will enable me to better understand the forces behind complex institutional arrangements in developing countries and their political economy.