Research Statement

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I study the political economy of institutions as well as research methods. My work in political economy and comparative politics asks how bureaucratic institutions shape state outputs, with a focus on low- and middle-income democracies, particularly those in Latin America. To answer these questions, I use both empirical analysis and formal theory, often in tandem. My empirical work often draws upon active collaboration with the governments that I study, which informs the questions that I ask and the research designs I pursue. This work identifies new mechanisms and evidence about how political institutions condition state capabilities and development outcomes.

In my methodological work, I address challenges that I encounter in my applied work. These problems are generally conceptual. To answer these questions, I generalize the problems that I confront in a specific research project by developing formal or conceptual frameworks. Using these frameworks, I articulate the problem more precisely, derive novel results, and propose solutions for applied research. This work focuses on external validity and evidence accumulation; the theoretical foundations of reduced-form estimands; and the formalization of experimental research ethics.

Political Economy of the State

Politician-Bureaucrat-Voter Interactions

In a series of papers, I argue that strategic relationships between politicians, bureaucrats, and citizens (voters) help us to understand distributive politics and electoral accountability in democracies. The literatures to which I contribute emphasize interactions between dyads of these actors: citizens (voters) and politicians, politicians and bureaucrats, or bureaucrats and citizens. By incorporating all three actors, I provide novel equilibrium predictions about behavior and outcomes including public service provision, political selection, and corruption. I articulate the case for theories that incorporate all three actors in a review essay, "Government Responsiveness in Developing Countries" published in the *Annual Review of Political Science* in 2022 (with Guy Grossman).

Two papers in this agenda consider the implications of citizen oversight of bureaucrats for the distribution of public services. In the first paper, "Squeaky Wheels and Inequality in Bureaucratic Service Provision," I argue that inequalities in access to public services emerge in the implementation. In practice, many services—like social welfare programs—are implemented in the course of interactions between street-level bureaucrats and citizens. When some citizens are more likely than others to complain to a politician (the bureaucrat's principal) about bureaucrats' actions, the threat of oversight leads bureaucrats to satisfy these squeaky wheels. In a national-scale audit experiment Colombia's two largest anti-poverty programs, I find that bureaucrats neglect marginalized citizens. This bias is largest in municipalities with greater inequality, where inequalities in voice are likely to be most pronounced, and on tasks where oversight from politicians is most likely. These findings provide evidence that implementation of social policy can generate inequality in access to these services, even when budgets allocated to these services are equal.

A second paper studying citizen oversight of bureaucrats, entitled "Oversight, Capacity, and Inequality," proposes a formal model to understand the adoption and design of bureaucratic oversight institutions. I argue that politicians' use of citizen complaints to oversee bureaucrats generates variation in a state's capacity to implement public policies and shapes who accesses state services.

In a model of service provision, citizen complaints generate information that directs a politician's remediation of bureaucratic decisions and may increase bureaucratic effort. Politicians design oversight institutions by choosing the strength of effort incentives and deciding whether to incentivize citizens to complain. I show that reliance on citizen complaints to direct oversight increases inequality in the ultimate distribution of services. However, using information on from these complaints has an ambiguous effect on the state's capacity for accurate policy implementation: capacity increases if and only if a sufficient share of citizens can be incentivized to complain. This paper shows how bureaucratic oversight institutions shape policy implementation capacity and inequality in comparative perspective.

Per my fieldwork and empirical research in Latin America, bureaucratic quality is one of the most immediate sources of observable variation across bureaucratic entities. In "Bureaucratic Quality and Electoral Accountability" (winner of the 2022 Fiona McGillivray Award for Best Paper in Political Economy presented at APSA in 2022), I consider how variation in bureaucratic quality shapes accountability relationships between politicians and voters. I propose a simple model of electoral accountability in which a politician funds a public good (or diverts public funds to rents), a bureaucrat implements the public good, and a voter may observe the public good and learn about the politician's type before casting their ballot. I show that because of the co-production of public goods by the politician and bureaucrat, the model yields distinct empirical implications at different levels of bureaucratic quality. These differences occur because of pooling in politicians' allocation behavior at low and high levels of bureaucratic quality. These predictions rationalize some existing conflicting empirical findings. To illustrate how my model makes sense of these otherwise inconsistent results, I develop a new research design——a theoretically structured meta-study——to synthesize existing findings. I implement two such meta-studies: one on the corruption/accountability of Brazilian mayors and one on pre-electoral information experiments. Both provide evidence consistent with the model.

Bureaucratic Production of Administrative Data

In an ongoing set of projects, I study the bureaucratic origins of state administrative data. States collect vast amounts of information for use in public administration and policymaking. While existing literature considers state data collection from individuals (e.g., censuses and vital statistics), it largely neglects data that is produced within and between bureaucratic agencies. My research studies the production of state data as a strategic interaction between central and decentralized bureaucracies. This interaction is interesting precisely because central government bureaucracies deploy policy instruments—largely enforcement or transfers—on the basis of information provided by decentralized bureaucracies. The use of data shapes decentralized bureaucracies' reporting incentives. These dynamics, in turn, affect how the central government can use data in policymaking.

My first working paper in this agenda "The Limits of Decentralized Administrative Data Collection: Experimental Evidence from Colombia" (with Natalia Garbiras-Díaz) asks how oversight by the central government affects decentralized governments' reporting incentives. To answer this question, we collaborated with the Procuraduría General de la Nación (PGN/Attorney-Inspector General) to study the production of the 2020 National Transparency Index. We experimentally varied the salience of direct oversight of the reported data through direct communication from the PGN to the near-universe of Colombian pubic-sector entities ($n = 6,556$). We show that bureaucrats respond to more salient oversight by reporting less desirable scores. We then conduct a separate, independent audit of a subset of the index items, we show that selection into reporting and misreporting varies with true performance. These limits to data quality—and hence, legibility—constrain the central government's ability to effectively use data to improve transparency or efficient governance.

Two ongoing solo data-collection efforts further this research agenda. First, with funding from

the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation (through an Innovations for Poverty Action regranting initiative), I conducted an original survey of three bureaucrats per Colombian local government, allowing for measurement of within-institution variation. These bureaucrats were identified as the representatives responsible for submitting different information or data to the central government (contracts data, applications for fiscal transfers, and the means-testing registry for social programs). The survey measures bureaucrat preferences and perceptions of agency relationships within their local government and with the national government. Second, with funding from the Inter-American Development Bank and in collaboration with Colombia's Departamento Administrativo de Prosperidad Social, I am currently conducting an experiment embedded in a new survey of municipal services conducted by the national government. The experiment aims to measure the politicization of reporting within local governments. Both projects will inform our understanding of the incentives within and between bureaucratic entities that generate variation in state data quality.

Justice-Sector Institutions

Latin America is vastly over-represented in measures of violent crime, which generates substantial welfare losses. States' policy response to these issues works through the justice system. In a number of empirical projects, I study how bureaucratic incentives within justice systems—courts and police—shape these outcomes. In "Misgovernance and Human Rights: The Case of Illegal Detention without Intent" (with Christopher Fariss), published in the *American Journal of Political Science* and winner of the 2022 *AJPS* Best Article Award, we study how agency problems in Haiti's courts perpetuate high rates of illegal pretrial dention. While existing explanations of human rights abuses emphasize a strategic logic of repression, we argue that certain classes of abuses may arise absent the intent to repress because of the misaligned bureaucratic incentives of state agents. We measure the responses of state agents working within the Haitian criminal justice system to a randomized, free legal assistance intervention for detainees held in illegal pretrial detention. Legal assistance addresses moral hazard problems of the bureaucrats responsible for processing cases. We demonstrate that legal assistance accelerates case advancement and liberation, in line with the view that large-scale human rights abuses in the justice system can result from poor governance and not repressive intent.

In a different project, I study the relationships between citizens and police officers in Medellín, Colombia. We ask how voluntary interactions between citizens and beliefs shape citizen beliefs about the police in a context in which measures like trust in police show little response to vast improvements in public safety. In a year-long, city-wide experiment, we show that there was no discernible effect on attitudes. In "Preaching to the Choir: A Problem of Participatory Interventions," Rebecca Hanson, Dorothy Kronick, and I argue that non-random selection into these voluntary interactions limits the possibility for positive updating about the police. Specifically, we show that community members who choose to engage in dialogue with police officers, are those who trust the police to begin with—i.e., those who are hardest to impress and easiest to disappoint. Using data from other community policing interventions, we show that this positive selection is not unique to Medellín. As such, we argue that this preaching-to-the-choir problem undermined the the effect of the Medellín intervention and, we argue, poses an under-recognized threat to related initiatives globally.

Primaries and Intraparty Governance

Two early papers examine intraparty governance. In "A Dynamic Model of Primaries," published in *Journal of Politics* (with Erin York and Michael Ting), we examine decentralized adoption of primary elections by parties. We propose an infinite horizon model of primary adoption that explores a central trade off: primaries produce more electable candidates but losing a primary deprives party elites of private goods (rents) and future elite status. We show that parties adopt primaries

when electorally disadvantaged and when polarization (distance between parties) increases, because polarization increases the cost of defeat. In "After Defeat: How Governing Parties Respond to Electoral Loss," published in *Political Science Research and Methods* (with Yotam Margalit and Michael Ting), we explore how governing party policy platforms respond to loss of power (governing status). In our empirical analyses, we find that parties disproportionately shift to the extreme after losing power. We find suggestive evidence that these shifts are mediated by the size of the party leadership selectorate. To organize these empirical findings, we introduce a dynamic model of party leadership selection and platform positioning. The model produces patterns of ideological positions over time that are consistent with our empirical findings.

Methods Work

External Validity and Evidence Accumulation

My interest in evidence accumulation stems from my leadership of Evidence in Governance and Politics' (EGAP's) Metaketa III on community monitoring of common-pool natural resources and my participation in the Colombian site in EGAP's Metaketa IV on community policing. Both projects use treatment-harmonized experiments to measure the effects of an intervention in six sites. The results of these projects are reported in two first-authored articles in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* and a co-authored article in *Science*.

While these costly projects sought to study the generalizabilty of the effects of their respective interventions, it became clear that the relationship between our meta-study research design and the external validity of the mechanisms that we were testing was under-specified. To this end, I started work on the conceptual foundations of external validity with Scott Tyson. We propose a conceptual framework for meta-study design, formalize concepts of external valdity and the relationships between empirical targets across studies, and derive results relating these concepts to research designs for evidence accumulation. Our first paper "External Validity and Meta-Analysis" is published in the *American Journal of Political Science*. Our second paper, "Sign Congruence, External Validity, and Replication" develops a new concept of sign-congruent external validity and links theoretical properties of replication tests to the statistical tests that are typically evaluated. Our book project, *External Validity and Evidence Accumulation*, under contract at Cambridge University Press, develops a larger conceptual framework for research design in order to understand the theoretical properties of replication, meta-analysis, and extrapolation-based approaches to evidence accumulation.

Theoretical Foundations of the Reduced-Form

Much of my applied work on bureaucracy employs both theoretical models and reduced-form analysis. While reduced-form analysis is currently dominant in political science, we know less about how these estimands link to the concepts we seek to measure and the theoretical predictions we seek to test. This recent and ongoing work seeks to characterize reduced-form research designs formally to understand which questions they can answer and which they cannot.

In designing several experiments that measure sequential bureaucratic processes, I noticed the prevalence of underappreciated identification problems on downstream outcomes (those further into the process). In "Phantom Counterfactuals," published in the *American Journal of Political Science*, I generalize this problem to show that average treatment effects (ATEs) are only identified until the first behavior that affects the set of possible subsequent actions. I explain that when one action changes the set of possible subsequent actions, it creates "phantom counterfactuals," or undefined potential outcomes, which render ATEs unidentified. I show that applied theory allows researchers to diagnose phantom counterfactuals, which helps to recognize unidentified ATEs and focus instead

on other estimands that are identified. This work establishes the necessity of applied theory for causal identification in empirical research with sequential behavioral outcomes.

Formal Approaches to Experimental Ethics

Several of my experiments propose innovations in research design to reduce ethical concerns about the intervention or measurement of outcomes. To this end, some current work seeks to provide general formal frameworks of the ethical considerations in social science. Such frameworks can provide insights about how to design experiments (or when not to experiment). In a first paper, "The Ethics of Electoral Experiments: Design-Based Recommendations," I tackle the concern that by intervening in real elections, social science experiments may change aggregate electoral outcomes. In the paper, I formally characterize electoral experimental designs to derive an upper bound on aggregate electoral impact under different assumptions about interference. I then introduce a decision rule based on comparison of this bound to predicted election outcomes to determine whether an experiment should be implemented. I demonstrate that existing experiments vary substantially in their (*ex-ante*) risk of changing aggregate electoral outcomes. This analysis shows that researchers can mitigate the possibility of affecting aggregate outcomes by reducing the saturation of treatment or focusing experiments in districts where treated voters are unlikely to be pivotal. These conditions identify novel trade-offs between adhering to ethical commitments and the statistical power and external validity of electoral experiments. More broadly, the paper illustrates how formal analysis can facilitate the design of more ethical experiments in social science.

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