

RYU MATSUURA

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Professional Experience

Nesta A Healthy Life mission Researcher	2025–
International Monetary Fund Western Hemisphere Department Summer Ph.D. Intern	2023
Development Data Lab Research Associate	2017–2019

Education

Northwestern University Ph.D. in Economics	2025
Northwestern University M.A. in Economics	2020
Colby College B.A. in Economics (<i>Honors & Distinction</i>) and Mathematical Science (<i>Distinction</i>), <i>Summa Cum Laude</i>	2017

Working Papers

Harnessing Satellite Data to Improve Social Assistance Targeting in the Eastern Caribbean (with Sophia Chen, Flavien Moreau, and Joana Pereira)

Abstract: Prioritizing populations most in need of social assistance is an important policy decision. In the Eastern Caribbean, social assistance targeting is constrained by limited data and the need for rapid support in times of large economic and natural disaster shocks. We leverage recent advances in machine learning and satellite imagery processing to propose an implementable strategy in the face of these constraints. We show that local well-being can be predicted with high accuracy in the Eastern Caribbean region using satellite data and that such predictions can be used to improve targeting by reducing aggregation bias, better allocating resources across areas, and proxying for information difficult to verify.

Political Implications of Trade Liberalization: Evidence from India (with Sebastian Jävervall and Roza Khoban)

Abstract: In recent decades, many developing countries have integrated into the global economy through trade reforms. However, the gains from trade liberalization have been unevenly distributed among various economic and social groups. This paper examines how adverse economic shocks, induced by trade liberalization, influenced voting behavior and political representation among marginalized groups in India. By utilizing exogenous variation in regional exposure to tariff reductions from India's 1990s trade liberalization and constructing a novel dataset that links politicians to social communities, we establish causal estimates of the economic and political effects of trade reforms. Our findings reveal that trade liberalization led to a relative decline in consumption and earnings growth for marginalized workers. In response, these groups increased their political engagement, resulting in higher vote shares and representation for marginalized politicians, while non-marginalized politicians experienced a corresponding decline. We show that these political effects were most pronounced in districts with a significant marginalized population share, suggesting a political backlash from marginalized groups. Furthermore, we provide evidence that a redistributive policy mitigated these political changes, thereby supporting the economic grievances hypothesis.

Political (Mis)selection: The Role of Historical Institutions (with Shubhro Bhattacharya and Utsav Manjeer)

Abstract: Is there a persistent impact of historical institutions on the selection of “bad” politicians? In this paper, we document the nuanced consequences of history on modern adverse political selection using variations in colonial land tenure systems during British rule in India. Politicians with criminal charges are significantly more likely to run for office, and win elections, in areas where extractive landlords historically held substantial property rights. Corrupt politicians who experience disproportionately large private financial gains in office, however, are significantly more likely to be in areas where individual cultivators historically held property rights. Our analysis establishes that these estimates are not biased by endogeneity concerns. Rather, a plausible mechanism indicates a comparative advantage for criminal politicians in the conflictual electoral environment of landlord areas. The relatively less competitive elections in non-landlord areas, instead, are susceptible to elite capture and subsequent wealth accumulation via corporate connections by politicians.

Publications

Development Research at High Geographic Resolution: An Analysis of Night Lights, Firms, and Poverty in India Using the SHRUG Open Data Platform (with Sam Asher, Toby Lunt, and Paul Novosad), *World Bank Economic Review* (2021)

Shifted Baselines Reduce Willingness to Pay for Conservation (with Loren McClenachan, Shah Payal, and Sahan Dissanayake), *Frontiers in Marine Science* (2018)

The Proposed Park in Maine's North Woods: Preferences of Out-of-State Visitors (with Sahan Dissanayake and Andrew Meyer), *Maine Policy Review* (2016)

Work in Progress

Market Integration and Cost of Borders in Africa (with Robin Burgess, Ameet Morjaria, and Gerard Padró i Miquel)

Teaching Experience

Northwestern University

Introduction to Microeconomics 2023

Colby College

Statistics for Economics 2017

Microeconomic Theory 2015

Presentations

- 2025 7th Japanese Association for Development Economics Conference
- 2024 4th Early Career Workshop in Quantitative Political Economy, 6th QMUL Economics and Finance Workshop for PhD & Post-doctoral Students, Lewis Lab Graduate Student Workshop
- 2023 Pathways to Development Conference
- 2022 Society for Institutional & Organizational Economics, European Meeting of Urban Economics Association, Infra4Dev Conference
- 2017 Maine Economic Conference
- 2016 Heartland Environmental and Resource Economic Workshop

Grants, Scholarship, & Awards

- 2023 Weiss Fund, with Anton Reinicke and Yasuka Tateishi (\$10,000)
- International Growth Centre Small Research Grant, with Anton Reinicke and Yasuka Tateishi (£6,000)
- Private Enterprise Development in Low-Income Countries Exploratory Research Grant, with Anton Reinicke and Yasuka Tateishi (£10,000)
- 2021–2024 Japan Student Service Organization Scholarship
- 2019–2021 Japan-IMF Scholarship
- 2017 Breckenridge Prize (highest GPA among senior economic majors)
- Phi Beta Kappa (top 9% of senior class)
- 2016 Economics Department Prize for Junior with Highest GPA
- Leslie Dougherty Biddle '89 and George Biddle Fund for International Service Learning, Internships, and Research

Refereeing

World Bank Economic Review

Skills

Programming: Python, R, SQL, HTML/CCS
Software: MATLAB, Stata, QGIS
Tools: Git/Github, BitBucket, Unix Shell, VS Code, Web APIs, Microsoft Office

Professional Activities

- 2020–2023 Northwestern University Economics Ph.D. Mentorship Program
- 2021 Northwestern University Development Lunch Seminar Organizer