

Sara Lowes

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Academic Positions

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO	
Associate Professor (with tenure), Department of Economics	2024–
Assistant Professor, Department of Economics	2020–2024
MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY	
Hal Varian Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of Economics	2023
STANFORD UNIVERSITY	
Postdoctoral Fellow, King Center on Global Development	2019–2020
BOCCONI UNIVERSITY	
Assistant Professor, Department of Economics	2017–2019

Education

HARVARD UNIVERSITY	2017
Ph.D., Political Economy and Government	
Thesis: “Essays on Culture and Institutions”	
Committee: Nathan Nunn, Alberto Alesina, Claudia Goldin, James Robinson	
HARVARD UNIVERSITY	2014
M.A., Political Economy and Government	
MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE	2007
B.A., Economics and Political Science (<i>summa cum laude</i>)	

Affiliations

Society for Institutional and Organizational Economics (SIOE), Board Member	2025–2027
International Growth Centre (IGC), Research Affiliate	2025–
National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), Research Associate (DEV, PE)	2024–
Association for the Study of Religion, Economics, and Culture (ASREC), Board Member	2023–2026
Association for Comparative Economic Studies (ACES), Board Member	2023–2025
Jameel Poverty Action Lab (JPAL), Invited Researcher	2023–
Bureau for Research and Economic Analysis of Development (BREAD), Affiliate	2021–
National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), Faculty Research Fellow (DEV, PE)	2020–2024
Center for Effective Global Action (CEGA), Affiliate	2020
Canadian Institute for Advanced Research (CIFAR), Azrieli Global Scholar	2017–2019
Centre for Economic Policy Research (CEPR), Research Affiliate	2017–

Publications

“[Family Structure and Childcare in Sub-Saharan Africa](#)” (with A. Donald and J. Vaillant), *American Economic Association Papers and Proceedings*, May 2024, Vol. 114, pp 449-453.

“[The Slave Trade and the Origins of Matrilineal Kinship](#)” (with N. Nunn), *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, March 2024, Vol. 379, No. 1897.

“Stress, Ethnicity, and Prosocial Behavior” (with J. Haushofer, A. Musau, D. Ndetei, N. Nunn, M. Poll, and N. Qian), *Journal of Political Economy Microeconomics*, May 2023, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 225–269.

“Kinship Structure, Stress, and the Gender Gap in Competition” *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, December 2021, Vol. 192, pp. 36–57.

“Concessions, Violence, and Indirect Rule: Evidence from the Congo Free State” (with E. Montero), *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, November 2021, Vol. 136, No. 4, pp. 2047–2091.

“The Legacy of Colonial Medicine in Central Africa” (with E. Montero), *American Economic Review*, April 2021, Vol. 111, No. 4, pp. 1284–1314.

“Traditional Medicine in Central Africa” (with E. Montero), *American Economic Association Papers and Proceedings*, May 2019, Vol. 109, No. 5, pp. 516–520.

“The Genetic Legacy of State Centralization in the Kuba Kingdom of the Democratic Republic of the Congo” (with L. van Dorp, J. Weigel, N. Ansari-Pour, S. López, J. Mendoza-Revilla, J.A. Robinson, J. Henrich, M.G. Thomas, N. Nunn, and G. Hellenthal), *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, January 2019, Vol. 116, No. 2, pp. 593–598.

“The Evolution of Culture and Institutions: Evidence from the Kuba Kingdom” (with N. Nunn, J.A. Robinson, and J. Weigel), *Econometrica*, July 2017, Vol. 85, No. 4, pp. 1065–1091.

“Understanding Ethnic Identity in Africa: Evidence from the Implicit Association Test (IAT)” (with N. Nunn, J.A. Robinson, and J. Weigel), *American Economic Review Papers and Proceedings*, May 2015, Vol. 105, No. 5, pp. 340–345.

Working Papers

“Age Organization and Accountability, and the Balance of Power: Evidence from Villages in Rural Congo” (with E. Montero, N. Nunn, and J.A. Robinson), 2025.

“Culture at a Crossroads: Traditional Beliefs in Contemporary Africa” (with E. Le Rossignol and N. Nunn), 2025.

“Fallow Lengths and the Structure of Property Rights” (with E. Le Rossignol and E. Montero), 2025.

“Cash Transfers and Social Preferences of Children” (with J. Haushofer, M. Larrebourg, and L. Mait), 2025.

“Experimental Evidence on Rural Child Care Provision in the DRC” (with A. Donald and J. Vaillant), 2024.

“Kinship Structure and the Family: Evidence from the Matrilineal Belt” 2023. **Revise and Resubmit**, *Journal of the European Economic Association*.

“Ancestral Livelihoods and Moral Universalism: Evidence from Transhumant Pastoralism” (with E. Le Rossignol), 2022.

Book Chapters

“Religion in Emerging and Developing Regions” forthcoming in *Annual Review of Economics* (with B. Marx and E. Montero).

“Culture and Development Policy” forthcoming in *Handbook of Culture and Economic Behavior*, eds. B. Enke, P. Giuliano, N. Nunn, and L. Wantchekon, Elsevier, (with N. Bau and E. Montero).

“Lab Experiments in Developing Country Contexts” forthcoming in *Handbook on Experimental Methodology*, eds. E. Snowberg and L. Yariv, Elsevier, (with N. Nunn).

“Culture in Historical Political Economy” in *The Oxford Handbook of Historical Political Economy*, eds. J. Jenkins and J. Rubin, Oxford University Press, 2023.

“Ethnographic and Field Data in Historical Economics” in *The Handbook of Historical Economics*, Chapter 6, eds. A. Bisin and G. Federico, Elsevier Academic Press, 2021, pp. 147-177.

“Kinship Structure & Women: Evidence from Economics” *Daedalus*, Special Issue on Women and Equality. Eds. N. Keohane and F. Rosenbluth, Vol. 149, No. 1, Winter 2020, pp. 119-133.

“Does Bride Price Promote or Hinder Women’s Well-Being?” in *Towards Gender Equity in Development*. Eds. S. Anderson, L. Beaman and J. Platteau, Oxford University Press, 2018, pp. 117-138, (with N. Nunn).

“King Leopold’s Ghost: The Legacy of Labor Coercion in the DRC” *The Long Economic and Political Shadow of History, Volume 2: Africa and Asia*. Eds. S. Michalopoulos and E. Papaioannou, CEPR Press, 2017, pp. 75-86, (with E. Montero).

Research In Progress

“Authority and Political Power in the DRC” (with E. Montero, N. Nunn, and J.A. Robinson). **[Fieldwork Complete]**.

“Digitizing the Ethnographic Survey of Africa: New Data on Pre-Colonial sub-Saharan African Culture and Politics” (with J. Moscona, N. Nunn, and A. Seck). **[Data Collection Complete]**.

Research Awards and Honors

The Weiss Fund for Research in Development Economics, 2025. “Integrating Traditional and Conventional Medicine for Improved Healthcare Access” (with F. Budillon and A. Gray).

Center for Effective Global Action, 2025. “Integrating Traditional and Conventional Medicine for Efficient Public Service Delivery”.

International Growth Centre, 2024. “Integrating Traditional and Conventional Medicine for Efficient Public Service Delivery” (with F. Budillon and A. Gray).

The Weiss Fund for Research in Development Economics, 2023. “Measuring the Moral Fabric of African Societies: A New Ethnographic Database” (with J. Moscona, N. Nunn, and A. Seck).

UCSD Economics Department Undergraduate Teaching Award, 2022-2023.

National Science Foundation CAREER Grant, 2023-2028. Award No. 2238314.

University of California, Society of Hellman Fellows, 2023-2024.

The Weiss Fund for Research in Development Economics, 2023. "Traditional Medicine and Demand for Modern Healthcare" (with F. Budillon and A. Gray).

UCSD Social Sciences Research Grant, 2023. "Traditional Medicine and Demand for Modern Healthcare".

UCSD General Campus Research Award, 2023. "Kinship Structure and the Extended Family: Evidence from the Matrilineal Belt".

UCSD Faculty Career Development Program, 2022.

The Weiss Fund for Research in Development Economics, 2020. "The Impact of Wealth on Prosociality" (with J. Haushofer and L. Mait).

Pershing Square Venture Fund for Research on the Foundations of Human Behavior, 2020. "Age Organization and Accountability: Evidence from the DRC" (with E. Montero, N. Nunn, and J.A. Robinson).

Becker Friedman Institute's Initiative for the Study of Gender in the Economy, 2020. "Affirmative Action and Antisocial Behavior in the Workplace" (with R. Fabregas and H. Sarsons).

Pershing Square Venture Fund for Research on the Foundations of Human Behavior, 2020. "Conflict and Prosociality: Panel Evidence Beyond the In-group" (with N. Nunn, J. Weigel, and J.A. Robinson).

Ronald Coase Best Dissertation Award, 2019. Society for Institutional & Organizational Economics.

National Science Foundation, 2018. Award No. 1823988. "Experimental Evidence on Stress and In-group Preference" (with J. Haushofer and N. Nunn).

DFID RA4, 2017. "Age Sets, Accountability, and Public Goods Provision: Evidence from the DRC" (with E. Montero, N. Nunn, and J.A. Robinson).

Invited attendee, 2017. 6th Lindau Nobel Laureate Meeting on Economic Sciences, Lindau, Germany.

J-PAL Governance Initiative, 2016. "Age Organization and Accountability: Evidence from the DRC" (with E. Montero, N. Nunn, and J.A. Robinson).

Weiss Family Program Fund Grant, 2016. "Addressing Mistrust in Medicine in Central Africa" (with E. Montero).

Institute for Quantitative Social Science Travel Grant, 2015.

Center for African Studies Summer Research Grant, 2015.

Foundations of Human Behavior Initiative Summer Research Grant, 2014.

The History Project Research Grant, Center for History and Economics, 2014.

LEAP Research Grants, 2013-2015.

National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship, 2011-2017.

Theodore H. Ashford Dissertation Fellow, 2011-2017.

US State Department Critical Language Scholar, 2007.

Phi Beta Kappa and Prize for Best Thesis in Economics, Middlebury College, 2007.

Professional Activities

Referee: *AER: Insights, American Economic Journal: Applied Economics, American Economic Journal: Economic Policy, American Economic Review, American Journal of Political Science, American Political Science Review, Big Data and Society, Econometrica, Economica, Economic Development and Cultural Change, European Economic Review, Evolution and Human Behavior, Explorations in Economic History, Games and Economic Behavior, International Economic Review, Journal of Behavioral and Experimental Economics, Journal of Comparative Economics, Journal of Development Economics, Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization, Journal of Economic Growth, Journal of Economic History, Journal of Economic Literature, Journal of the European Economic Association, Journal of Human Resources, Journal of Political Economy, Journal of Political Economy Microeconomics, Journal of Population Economics, Journal of Public Economics, Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Quarterly Journal of Economics, The Economic Journal, The Economics of Transition, The Review of Economic Studies, The Review of Economics and Statistics, World Bank Economic Review, World Development, World Politics, National Science Foundation (NSF), European Research Council (ERC), IZA/DFID G²LM|LIC, Cultural Evolution Society, Israel Science Foundation (ISF), John Templeton Foundation (JSF).*

Conference: NBER DEV (program committee; December 2024); SIOE (program committee; June 2024, August 2025); BREAD (program committee; May 2024); Economic Development, Political Economy, and Culture (co-organizer; UCSD & CIFAR, September 2023); Culture and Development Economics (co-organizer; UCLA & CIFAR, December 2022); SIOE (program committee; 2020, 2021, 2025); Culture and Preference Formation (co-organizer; UCLA & CIFAR, February 2020).

Discussant: NBER Culture and Institutions (May 2025); NBER Culture and Institutions (April 2023); AS-REC (Harvard University, March 2023); Women in Empirical Microeconomics Conference (University of Chicago, August 2022); ASREC Graduate Student Workshop (June 2021); Toulouse Economics and Biology Workshop (May 2021); ZEW Conference on Ethnic Favoritism (December 2020); AEA (San Diego, January 2020); NBER Organizational Economics Fall Meeting (Cambridge, November 2019); Cultural Transmission and the Economics of Cultural Change: Theory, Empirics and Experiments (PSE, March 2018).

University Service: UCSD Hiring Committee (2023); UCSD PhD Admissions (2021, 2023, 2025); UCSD Academic Senate (2022-2024).

Teaching and Mentoring: CSWEP CeMENT mentor (2025); Association for Comparative Economic Studies (ACES) PhD Summer School (2023, 2024, 2025); African Economic Research Council (AERC) Research Methods Course (PhD) (2024)

Seminar and Conference Presentations

“Culture and Development Policy”

Queens University Belfast, Workshop on Cultural Transmission and Persistence, keynote (Belfast, June 2025); University of Bristol, BAEM Conference, keynote (Bristol, May 2025)

“Age Organization and Accountability”

CEMFI University, Applied Microeconomics Seminar (Madrid, November 2025); Warwick University, Political Economy/Applied Economics Seminar (Coventry, October 2025); Dartmouth University, Applied Seminar (Hanover, April 2025); University of California, Berkeley, Comparative Politics Seminar (Berkeley,

April 2025); UCSD PELG Conference (San Diego, November 2024).

“Culture, Beliefs, and Health Care Utilization in Africa”

Digital Development Dialogues, University of Gottingen (January 2024).

“Authority and Political Power in the DRC”

ASSA Meeting (San Antonio, January 2024); ASREC Conference (Milan, December 2023).

“Fallow Lengths and the Structure of Property Rights”

University of British Columbia, Development Seminar (Vancouver, April 2024); $G^2LM|LIC$ & BREAD Conference (Nairobi, December 2023); Columbia University SIPA (New York, December 2023); Chapman University (Los Angeles, November 2023); University of Southern California (LA, October 2023); CEPR-TCD-TIME Conference on Economic Development (Dublin, October 2023); Political Economy of Development Conference, Northwestern Kellogg/UBC (Chicago, September 2023); Deep Roots of Comparative Development Conference, Brown University (Providence, May 2023); Organizational Economics Seminar, MIT (Cambridge, May 2023); Development and International Economics Seminar, Boston University (Boston, April 2023); Australian Health and Human Capital Economics Virtual Seminar (April 2023); Lund University (Lund, March 2023); Copenhagen University (Copenhagen, March 2023); ASREC (Cambridge, March 2023); Development and International Seminar, New York University (NYC, March 2023); Economic Development Seminar, MIT/Harvard University (Cambridge, February 2023); Economic History Seminar, Harvard University (Cambridge, February 2023); Economics Department, University of Oregon (Eugene, January 2023); Applied Economics Seminar, Michigan State University (November 2022); Development Seminar, University of Washington (Seattle, November 2022); IIES (Stockholm September, 2022); BSE Summer Forum, Towards Sustained Economic Growth (Barcelona, June 2022).

“Ancestral Livelihoods and Moral Universalism: Evidence from Transhumant Pastoralist Societies”

Utah Organizational and Political Economics Conference, University of Utah (Snowbird, January 2023); PPE Seminar, Brown University (Providence, March 2022); Culture and Persistence Seminar, Vancouver School of Economics, (March 2022).

“The Social Consequences of Traditional Religion in Contemporary Africa”

CERGE-EI, Applied Seminar (Prague, November 2025); Oxford University, Development/PE Seminar (Oxford, October 2025); Loyola Marymount University (Los Angeles, April 2025); Free Market Institute Seminar, Texas Tech (Lubbock, January 2025); NOVA Africa Conference on Economic Development (Lisbon, June 2024); International Workshop on Migration and Family Economics, Paris-La Défense (Paris, June 2024); Africa Meeting of the Econometric Society (Abidjan, June 2024); BREAD Conference (La Jolla, May 2024); Development and Labor Seminar, Duke University (Durham, April 2024); ASSA Meeting (San Antonio, January 2024); Center for Decision Research, University of Chicago Booth School of Business (Chicago, November 2023); Brown University (Providence, September 2023); Toulouse Economics and Biology Workshop, IAST (Toulouse, June 2023); African Studies Lecture, University of Oregon (Eugene, January 2023); CEPR-STICERD Applications Seminar, London School of Economics (London, May 2022); University of Western Australia (April 2022); Evolutionary Anthropology Colloquium, University of California Davis (Davis, April 2022); The School of Collective Intelligence (April 2022); Fordham University (April 2022); NoBec Seminar, University of Pennsylvania (April 2022); Department Seminar, University of California, Berkeley (Berkeley, February 2022); BREAD/NBER Development Junior Pre-Conference (October 2021); Quantitative History Seminar, University of Hong Kong (October 2021); Broom Demography Seminar, UC Santa Barbara (Santa Barbara, October 2021); Political Economy Seminar, Harvard University (October 2021); Development Seminar, University of Southern California (Los Angeles, October 2021); Behavioral and Experimental Economics Seminar, University of Zurich (May 2021); NBER Culture and Institutions

Meeting (April 2021); guide-World Bank Development Seminar, Georgetown University (April 2021); Applied/CDES Seminar, Monash University (April 2021); Development Seminar, Columbia University (April 2021); University of Gothenburg (February 2021); UC Merced (January 2021); Economic Seminar Series, University of San Francisco (November 2020); Development Workshop, University of Wisconsin (October 2020); Development Conference, UCSD (La Jolla, February 2020); CIFAR IOG Meeting (Toronto, October 2019).

“Kinship Structure and the Family: Evidence from the Matrilineal Belt”

UCSD Rady (October 2020); Applied Micro Seminar, University of Melbourne (August 2020); Institute for Advanced Studies Toulouse (Toulouse, March 2020); Behavioral Seminar, Stanford University (Palo Alto, November 2019); SIOE Conference, Stockholm School of Economics (Stockholm, June 2019); Family and Development Conference, University of Bordeaux (Bordeaux, March 2019); BREAD Conference on Behavioral Economics and Development, Stanford University (Palo Alto, January 2019); George Mason University (Fairfax, October 2018); Cultural Evolution Society Conference, Arizona State University (Tempe, October 2018); Economic Development Seminar, University of Michigan (Ann Arbor, October 2018); APSA Annual Meeting (Boston, September 2018); King’s College London (London, May 2018); Clemson University (Clemson, March 2018); Stockholm School of Economics (Stockholm, March 2018); Women & Equality Conference, American Academy of Arts and Sciences (Cambridge, MA, December 2017); EUDN Conference (Gottingen, December 2017); Nova SBE (Lisbon, November 2017); CIFAR IOG Meeting (Toronto, October 2017); Stockholm University (Stockholm, September 2017); ASREC, University of Bologna (Bologna, September 2017); Galatina Summer Meetings (Galatina, August 2017); EGEN Conference, Yale University (New Haven, May 2017); Bocconi University (Milan, February 2017); NEUDC, MIT (Cambridge, MA, November 2016); Middlebury College (Middlebury, April 2016).

“The Legacy of Colonial Medicine in Central Africa”

Paris Sorbonne Sustainable Development Seminar, Paris 1 Pantheon Sorbonne University (Paris, March 2020); Center for African Studies, Stanford University (Palo Alto, February 2020); Hawaii Applied Micro One-Day Conference, University of Hawaii at Manoa (Honolulu, December 2019); BGIE Seminar, Harvard Business School (Cambridge, November 2019); Political Economy Workshop, Princeton University (Princeton, September 2019); Development Seminar, Stanford University (Palo Alto, September 2019); APSA Annual Meeting (Washington D.C., August 2019); Stockholm Institute of Transition Economics (Stockholm, April 2019); Northwestern Kellogg MEDS (Evanston, February 2019); NYU (New York, February 2019); Dartmouth College (Hanover, February 2019); University of Toronto (Toronto, February 2019); Vanderbilt University (Nashville, January 2019); UCSD (La Jolla, January 2019); AEA CSWEP Session (Atlanta, January 2019); Harris School of Public Policy, University of Chicago (Chicago, November 2018); Higher School of Economics (Moscow, November 2018); New School of Economics (Moscow, November 2018); CfPE Conference, Vancouver School of Economics (Vancouver, October 2018); BREAD Workshop on Development Economics Pre-Conference Session, LSE (London, September 2018); EHA Annual Meeting (Montreal, September 2018); V Calvó-Armengol Workshop: Persistence and Transformation in Economic Development (Barcelona, May 2018); CIFAR IOG Meeting (Toronto, April 2018); Catholic University of Milan (Milan, March 2018); PPE Seminar, George Mason University (Fairfax, February 2018); Macro History Seminar, Bonn University (Bonn, November 2017).

“Concessions, Violence, and Indirect Rule: Evidence from the Congo Free State”

Empirical Studies of Conflict Annual Meeting (ESOC), UCSD (La Jolla, May 2019); Dark Episodes in History Conference, King’s College London (London, December 2018); NBER Culture and Institutions Meeting (Cambridge, April 2018); American History Association Conference (Washington, D.C., January 2018); Deep Rooted Factors in Comparative Development Conference, Brown University (Providence, May 2017); Economic History Seminar, Stanford University (Palo Alto, April 2017); Pompeu Fabra University (Barcelona, February 2017); Sciences Po (Paris, February 2017); Copenhagen University (Copenhagen, February 2017); Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich (Munich, February 2017); Boston Uni-

versity (Boston, February 2017); Northwestern Kellogg MEDS (Evanston, January 2017); University of California Berkeley (Berkeley, January 2017); Yale University (New Haven, January 2017); HBS BGIE (Boston, January 2017); Middlebury College (Middlebury, January 2017); Stanford GSB Political Economy (Palo Alto, January 2017); WGAPE, World Bank (Washington D.C., April 2016); Conférence Sur la Croissance Économique Inclusive en RDC (Kinshasa, January 2015); B-WGAPE, MIT (Boston, December 2014); NEUDC, Boston University (Boston, November 2014); Brown University, Macro Lunch (Providence, September 2014).

“Does Bride Price Promote or Hinder Women’s Well-Being?”

UNU-WIDER Development Conference (Helsinki, September 2018)

“The Evolution of Culture and Institutions: Evidence from the Kuba Kingdom”

EHA Annual Meeting (Boulder, September 2016)

Teaching

University of California, San Diego:

Ec 237: Political Economy (PhD) 2021-2025

Ec 116: Development Economics (UG) 2021-2025

Massachusetts Institute of Technology:

14.773: Political Economy: Institutions and Development (PhD) 2023

14.75: Political Economy and Economic Development (UG/MA) 2023

Bocconi University:

Ec 20287: Development Economics (MA) 2018-2019

Ec 30145: Development Economics (UG) 2018-2019