

CLARA SIEVERT

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Academic Employment	CERGE-EI Assistant Professor (tenure-track), since Fall 2024
Education	Harvard University Ph.D. Political Economy and Government (Economics), 2024 M.A. Economics, 2024 Bonn University, Germany M.Sc., Economics, 2017 Münster University, Germany B.Sc., Economics, 2014
Fields	<i>Primary:</i> Development Economics, Political Economy, Health Economics <i>Secondary:</i> Experimental Economics, Economic History
References	Nathan Nunn (University of British Columbia) Marcella Alsan (Harvard Kennedy School) Emily Breza (Harvard University) David Yang (Harvard University)
Fellowships & Awards	Center for International Development, PhD Affiliate, Harvard University, 2022-2023 Harvard University Certificate of Distinction in Teaching, 2021 Doctoral Fellowship Harvard University, 2018-2020, 2023-2024 Erasmus Grant for Visiting Scholars in EU, 2015 Hays Aluminum Bachelor Award for Top 3 in Business, Economics, Computer Science, 2014
Teaching	Data Science: Foundations of Statistics (M.Sc.), CERGE-EI, lecturer, 2024 Comparative Historical Economic Development (Ph.D.), Harvard University, teaching fellow (TF) for Prof. Nathan Nunn, 2021 Economics and Morality (B.Sc.), Harvard University, TF for Prof. Benjamin Enke, 2021 Religion and Political Economy (B.Sc.), Harvard University, TF for Prof. Robert Barro, 2020 A Libertarian Perspective on Economic (B.Sc.), Social, and Foreign Policy, Harvard University, TF for Jeffrey Miron, 2020
Research	Harvard University, Prof. Nathan Nunn, Graduate Research Assistant, 2019, 2022 University of Chicago, Prof. James Robinson, Graduate Research Assistant, 2019 European Central Bank, Financial Research Division, Research Assistant/Trainee, 2017-2018 Innovations for Poverty Action Colombia, Research Assistant, 2016
Working Papers and Work in Progress	“ Supernatural Beliefs about Illness and Modern Medicine Use: Evidence from the DRC ” <i>Abstract:</i> In many societies around the world, people attribute illness to supernatural forces, including deities, spirits, and malevolent agents. Using observational data from sub-Saharan Africa and an original large-scale survey in the Democratic Republic of Congo, I show that supernatural beliefs about illness are common and relevant for health behavior: They are associated with higher use of traditional healers, lower use of modern medicine, lower beliefs about the effectiveness of modern medicine, and higher stigma toward those with illness. Then, I conduct a field experiment and ask whether it is possible to shift beliefs and increase the take-up of modern medical treatment. I randomize an informational video about the biomedical origin and treatment of epilepsy, a prevalent disease commonly associated with supernatural forces. The intervention shifts respondents' beliefs away from supernatural causes and toward modern medicine's effectiveness for epilepsy as well as

for other conditions. The intervention reduces stigma toward those with the disease and increases take-up of free hospital consultations for epilepsy by 50%.

“**Graduate Student and Faculty Mental Health: Evidence from European Economics Departments**” (with Elisa Macchi, Paul Barreira, and Valentin Bolotnyy, revise and resubmit at *American Journal of Health Economics*)

Abstract: We study the mental health of graduate students and faculty at 14 Economics departments in Europe. Using clinically validated surveys sent out in the fall of 2021, we find that 34.7% of graduate students experience moderate to severe symptoms of depression or anxiety and 17.3% report suicidal or self-harm ideation in a two-week period. 15.8% of faculty members experience moderate to severe depression or anxiety symptoms, with prevalence higher among non-tenure-track (42.9%) and tenure-track (31.4%) faculty than tenured (9.6%) faculty. We estimate that the COVID-19 pandemic accounts for about 74% of the higher prevalence of depression symptoms and 30% of the higher prevalence of anxiety symptoms in our European sample relative to a 2017 U.S. sample of economics graduate students. We also document issues in the work environment, including a high incidence of sexual harassment.

“The Impact of Access to Cities: Experimental Evidence from the DRC” (with Marina Ngoma, Nathan Nunn, and Jonathan L. Weigel)

Abstract: Throughout the world, cities are drivers of economic growth. They are hubs of innovation, entrepreneurship, and social change. Yet, the mechanisms through which the economic benefits of cities occur remain poorly understood because many social and economic forces change in tandem with urbanization. We study the randomized rollout of a program promoting urban access in rural villages in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Implemented by a local NGO, this “City Access Program” (CAP) provides regular weekly transportation by motorbike taxi to the city of Kananga to individuals from rural villages. Our project seeks to provide causal evidence on the impacts of access to cities on economic behavior and wellbeing, gender norms, moral values such as preference for the in-group over the out-group, and psychological traits such as grit, self-control, and self-efficacy. The data collection has completed.

“Markets and the Making of Modern “Sensibilities”?: Experimental Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa” (with Xavier Jaravel, Marina Ngoma, Nathan Nunn, and Jonathan L. Weigel)

Abstract: We further seek to provide causal evidence on how markets shape values using the same program. We exploit exogenous variation in the participants’ access to markets, the total numbers of customers, and the number of repeated customers induced by the randomization to different market types. First, we empirically assess whether markets are value laden. Second, we test three classic hypotheses about markets in social sciences: (1) markets make humans more trusting, more trustworthy, and more likely to view social interaction as a positive-sum game (the *doux-commerce* thesis); (2) markets turn humans into self-interested utility maximizers who become more detached from their communities; (3) markets make humans feel poorer by raising the standards of material wealth that is perceived to be necessary for happiness (the *Rousseau* hypothesis).

“The Religious Landscape in Kananga, DRC” (with Gabriel Granato, Marina Ngoma, Nathan Nunn, and Jonathan L. Weigel)

Abstract: Across Sub-Saharan Africa, churches play pivotal roles as social, economic, and political centers in vibrant free religious markets, in which indigenous beliefs and Christian beliefs are practiced in syncretism. Churches offer educational, insurance, and welfare services, and serve as platforms for political discourse, profoundly influencing individuals’ values and aspirations. This project aims to enhance our understanding of the role of churches for economic development by providing descriptive evidence on the religious landscape in Kananga in the Democratic Republic of Congo. For this end, we conducted a comprehensive church census, representative surveys of pastors and congregants, and textual analyses of church service recordings.

Publications

“**Is Religion an Inferior Good? Evidence from Fluctuations in Housing Wealth**” (with Luc Laeven and Alexander Popov, *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, 2024, vol. 217)

Abstract: The question of whether religious activities decline with economic development has been actively debated in sociology and economics. We address this question exploiting house price fluctuations in the U.S. in the early 2000s. We show that an increase in local house prices is associated with a decline in time spent on religious activities for homeowners relative to renters. This effect is not present for volunteering and civic activities. The main result is driven by a wealth effect, whereby activities that have an inferior-good component decline with housing wealth, and by a substitution effect whereby the attractiveness of activities linked to the residential asset increases during housing booms.

Seminars & Conferences

Presentation at Berkeley-Stanford Political Economics and Development Graduate Student Conference, 2023
Annual Conference of the American Society of Health Economists (ASHEcon), 2024
Annual Conference of the European Economic Association (EEAs), 2024
Annual Conference of the Association for the Study of Religion, Economics, and Culture (ASREC), 2024
North Eastern Universities Development Consortium Conference (NEUDC), 2024
ASSA Annual Meetings, 2 co-author presentations, 2025 (scheduled)

Academic Service

Referee for *Quarterly Journal of Economics*
Co-Chair and Member of Harvard Economics Peer Support Network, 2020-2023
Co-Chair, Harvard Economics Mental Health Task Force, 2020-2022
Organizer, Early-Stage Research and Discussions on Political Economy and Culture Workshop, 2021-2023

Research Grants

National Science Foundation Grant, “Urbanization and Economic Growth in Sub-Saharan Africa”, with Nathan Nunn and Jonathan Weigel, 2021
Templeton Foundation Grant, “Religion as a Source of Social and Moral Development: Evidence from the Pentecostal Revolution in Africa”, with Marina Ngoma, Nathan Nunn, and Jonathan Weigel, 2021
The Weiss Fund for Research in Development Economics Grant, “Urban Networks and Economic Growth in Sub-Saharan Africa”, with Marina Ngoma, Nathan Nunn, and Jonathan Weigel, 2021
The Weiss Fund for Research in Development Economics Grant, “Epilepsy: Health Beliefs and Modern Medicine Use in Kananga, DRC”, 2021
Harvard Warburg Foundation Research Prize, “Epilepsy: Health Beliefs and Modern Medicine Use in Kananga, DRC”, 2021
HKS-REStat Research Funding, “Epilepsy: Health Beliefs and Modern Medicine Use in Kananga, DRC”, 2021
The Lab for Economic Applications and Policy (LEAP) at Harvard, “Epilepsy: Health Beliefs and Modern Medicine Use in Kananga, DRC”, 2021

Languages

German (native); English (fluent); Spanish (fluent); French (fluent)

Software skills

Stata, R, ArcGIS, Matlab, Python, SQL, ODKcollect

Personal information

Citizenship: German

Updated as of October 2024.