

Caterina Chiopris

Contact Information Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies caterinachiopris.com
Harvard University caterinachiopris@gmail.com
1727 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, MA 02138 +1 (617) 955-7592

Education

Harvard University, Cambridge, MA 2024
Ph.D. student, Political Economy and Government

Duke University, Durham, NC 2018
Master in Analytical Political Economy

Technische Universität Dresden, Dresden, Germany 2015
Bachelor in Internationale Beziehungen – international law, economics, and political science

Academic Positions

Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies 2024-2025
Cambridge, MA
Academy Scholar (Postdoctoral fellow)

Bocconi University, Milan, Italy 2022-2023
Visiting Lecturer in Comparative Politics

Berlin Social Science Center, Berlin, Germany 2022
Visiting Researcher, Transformations of Democracy Unit

Working Papers & Publications

A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing: Citizen Uncertainty and Democratic Backsliding.
with Monika Nalepa and Georg Vanberg
Forthcoming at the Journal of Politics

A prominent contemporary phenomenon is “backsliding” of democratic countries into (semi-) authoritarian practices. Such episodes often unfold gradually over time in contexts where the ultimate intentions of governments are not clear. We present a model that focuses on the role of such uncertainty in backsliding. In the model, a government engages in a reform that may allow for subsequent actions that are inconsistent with the rule of law. Citizens must decide whether to replace the incumbent following the reform. Consistent with existing work, the model suggests that polarization increases democratic backsliding. More importantly, the model demonstrates that in a dynamic setting, citizens may support incumbent governments even if citizens are fundamentally opposed to authoritarianism. The less concerned citizens are about facing a potential autocrat, as in relatively well-established democracies, the more likely it is that even moderate levels of polarization can set off the process of democratic backsliding. We illustrate the model’s implications using a survey experiment in contemporary Poland.

The Diffusion of Ideas.

Job Market Paper

The diffusion of innovation and new ideas is fundamental for economic growth, cultural shifts, and institutional change. How are new ideas created, and how do they diffuse? Specifically, how do spatial connections affect the generation and diffusion of ideas? Intuitively, a denser network should increase the number of novel ideas and augment their diffusion. I study knowledge production in Germany in the 19th century, relying on the universe of bibliographic records and novel railway statistics, among other original data, as well as cutting-edge machine learning and topology to measure ideas. I show that the railroad network increased the creation of new ideas, but decreased their diffusion. This was a by-product of specialization: with the railroad, groups of scholars could focus on narrower topics and co-locate with similar professionals; they learnt more from similar groups, but became disconnected from dissimilar ones. These patterns are those that paved the way for modern knowledge production, and they had important consequences for state institutions, on top of scientific discoveries and growth. Public officials and legislators were trained with narrower but deeper expertise. The bureaucracy became more specialized, and legislation more exhaustive.

Democratic Backsliding in Poland in Light of Rule of Law Accountability to the European Union

with Monika Nalepa

Emory Law Journal, 2024

In 2015, Poland began to gradually dismantle institutions of the rule of law that had been carefully put in place after its transition. Moreover, this process has been underway largely with the electorate's support. This is puzzling because only several years earlier rule of law seemed to be all but guaranteed by the country's accession to the European Union. If Poland is still a member of the EU, the EU is noticing erosion of the rule of law, and sounding the alarm, why are the eroders still being elected? We propose an explanation based on the dynamic model from Chiopris, Nalepa and Vanberg (2021) which posits that voters are deeply uncertain as to whether the incumbent they are about to reelect is introducing policy change because of his genuine ideological commitments or because he is a closet autocrat, for whom policy change is instrumental to usurping power. What is more, the authors find that there is an interactive relationship between democratic commitments and uncertainty. We test this theory with an experiment around the 2019 nationwide Polish elections and find that citizens with less exposure to democratic rule are more likely to reelect incumbents making sweeping policy change when they are uncertain about the true intentions of the incumbent's policy.

The Politics of Region-Biased Technological Change.

with Torben Iversen and David Soskice

The transition to the knowledge economy has been associated with a strong urban bias and rising regional inequality, which is explained by the co-location decisions of knowledge-intensive businesses and highly educated workers. Yet, the geographical concentration of such businesses and skilled workers is far from uniform across countries. We explain this variation as a result of public policies responding to institutionally-mediated political coalitions. We show that the concentration of innovation, measured by geocoded patent applications, is closely linked to differences in political institutions. We propose a (quasi) diff-in-diff design to demonstrate that the effects of technological shocks on inequality are also linked to differences in expected coalitions.

Why Did Conservatives Fear Democracy?

with Brian Rathbun, Fabio Ellger, and Daniel Ziblatt

Canonical works in political science and economics explain the success or failure of democratic transitions and the stability of democracy with reference to the preferences of predemocratic elites. For example, classic works ranging from Acemoglu and Robinson (2006) and Boix

(2003) to recent works such as Albertus and Menaldo (2018) make predictions about the relationship of economic inequality and democracy, presuming a logic that economic redistribution under conditions of high economic inequality drives elite opposition to democracy. But are political economy motives the factors that actually historically drove conservative elite opposition to democracy? We examine this question by turning to the historical record of the predemocratic German Reichstag (1871-1933). We test the political economy assumption that fear of democracy was rooted in fear of redistribution vis-à-vis an alternative argument that conservatives in historical Germany resisted democratization out of a psychologically-rooted motivated-reasoning opposition to the leveling of social hierarchies and relative social status. We conduct a series of quantitative text analyses to unravel which narratives against democratization have been predominantly used by conservative parliamentarians and how their arguments changed over time. In addition, we present further historical evidence to substantiate our proposition of conservative social identity as a major motivation to maintain the status quo – and counteract democratic power sharing. Our findings contribute to the ongoing discussion about the role of conservative elites during the emergence of liberal democracy in Western societies.

Elites' Social Networks and the Origins of State Capacity.

with Yubua Wang

A key challenge for the early modern state was the integration of the periphery into the central state apparatus. Specifically, the central state faces a credible commitment problem when trying to extract resources from the periphery in exchange for protection and public good provision. In a simple model, we argue that marriage networks can make this commitment credible, by aligning the incentives of the elites in the periphery and the center. We find the process of social integration between center and periphery to be self-reinforcing. We evaluate our argument using the case of early modern Venice. We exploit an exogenous demographic shock that pushed the elites from the center to marry the elites from the periphery. Using a difference-in-differences design to compare families that were integrated into the nobility marriage networks earlier with those that were integrated later, we show that social integration is positively associated with investment in public debt. We also observe increased tax revenues from the provinces that had families integrated and more military spending and state institutions established in the integrated provinces. Our findings highlight the role of social networks in aligning the incentives of central and local elites in favor of a strong central state.

The Religious Origins of the Welfare State.

with Francesca Miserochi

How did the modern welfare state originate, and how did its origin affect its long-term development and efficiency? The literature has mostly pointed to the strength of the labor movement or social cleavages as determinants of welfare provision. Within the Italian post-unitary context, we take a different approach by highlighting that, in its early stages, welfare was not created anew by the state, but had instead been provided for centuries - by institutions affiliated with the Catholic Church. We study the effect of the incorporation of these institutions into the state apparatus in 1890. We thus link historical welfare provision to the quality of welfare once it was under state control, by focusing on charities that were previously run by the clergy and that had to switch to private or public administration. We expect the effect of the change in administration to be positive in the regions where state institutions originated, and negative in the regions where state institutions were exported and ineffective at the local level. Using detailed historical records of Church-affiliated charities, their services and budgets, we use a difference-in-differences strategy to study the effect of state incorporation on welfare provision, health and literacy outcomes, institutional resource management and administrative change.

What We Get Wrong About Closing the Racial Wealth Gap.

with William Darity Jr., Darrick Hamilton, Mark Paul, Alan Aja, Anne Price, Antonio Moore. Insight Center for Community Economic Development, 2018

Covered by: [MSNBC](#), [Fortune](#), [Bloomberg](#).

We address ten commonly held myths about the racial wealth gap in the United States. We contend that a number of ideas frequently touted as “solutions” will not make headway in reducing black-white wealth disparities. These conventional ideas include greater educational attainment, harder work, better financial decisions, and other changes in habits and practices on the part of blacks. While these steps are not necessarily undesirable, they are wholly inadequate to bridge the racial chasm in wealth.

Grants & Awards	2024	John Sprague Award Best Paper Award in Political Networks
	2024	UniCredit Foundation Junior Researcher Best Paper Award
	2024	Senator Charles Sumner Prize Dissertation Award
	2024	Institute for Humane Studies Fellowship
	2023	NSF, Grant for diversity in political methodology
	2023	Institute for Quantitative Social Science, Research Grant
	2023	Business and Government Research Cluster Grant
	2022	Stone Inequality Research Fellowship
	2022	Krupp Foundation Dissertation Research Fellowships
	2021	Excellence in Teaching Award
	2021	Weatherhead Center Graduate Student Associate Grant
	2021	Weatherhead Center Mid-Dissertation Grant
	2021	Harvard GSAS Student Council, Summer Research Grant
	2018	Master’s Scholar Award, Duke University Economics Department
	2015	Scholarship, Confucius Institute
2014	Full scholarship, German Academic Exchange Service Honorary title ‘Alfiere del Lavoro’ of the Italian Republic, awarded by the President of the Italian Republic, on behalf of Federazione Nazionale Cavalieri del Lavoro	

Skills Languages: Italian (native), German (fluent), Chinese (advanced), French and Spanish (basic)
Software: R, Python, Latex

Teaching Experience Lecturer, *Comparative Political Institutions & Institutional Development (game theory)*
Bocconi University, Milan, Graduate course, Fall 2022

Lecturer, *International Political Economy*
Technische Universität Dresden, Undergraduate course, Summer 2019

Teaching Fellow, *Advanced Quantitative Methods II: Econometric Methods*
Harvard Kennedy School, Prof. Will Dobbie, Graduate course, Spring 2021
& 2022

Teaching Fellow, *Politics of Europe*
Harvard Government Department, Prof. Daniel Ziblatt, Undergraduate
course, Fall 2021

Teaching Assistant, *Intermediate Microeconomics: Advanced*
Harvard Economics Department, Prof. Edward Glaeser, Undergraduate
course, Fall 2021

Instructor, *Coding in R*
Harvard Kennedy School, Graduate course, January 2021

Teaching Fellow, *Political Economy of Non-Democracies*
Harvard Economics Department, Prof. David Yang, Graduate course, Fall
2020

Teaching Fellow, *Quantitative Analysis and Empirical Methods*
Harvard Kennedy School, Prof. David Deming, Graduate course, Fall 2020

Teaching Assistant, *Macroeconomics*
Duke University Economics Department, Prof. Pietro Peretto, Graduate
course, Spring 2018

Instructor, *Statistics and Research Writing*
Young Scholars Summer Research Institute at Duke University, 2017

Teaching Assistant, *Race and Higher Education*
Duke University Economics Department, Prof. William Darity Jr.,
Undergraduate course, Spring 2017

**Academic
Service and
Engagement**

Referee for: Quarterly Journal of Economics, Journal of Urban Economics,
Journal of Political Economy, American Political Science Review, American
Journal of Political Science, Comparative Political Studies, *Economica*,
Political Science Research and Methods, Political Research Quarterly,
Legislative Studies Quarterly, Journal of European Public Policy,
Governance.

Co-chair, Seminar on European Development in a Historical Perspective,
Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies at Harvard, 2024-2025

Graduate Student Coordinator, Comparative Politics Research Workshop,
Harvard Government Department, 2019-2020

Co-founder and Chair, International Student Committee, Harvard
Government Department, 2019-2020

**Invited
Presentations and
Conferences**

- 2024 Institutions, Organizations, and Growth Program, at the Becker Friedman Institute for Economics, University of Chicago; Laboratory for the Economics of the African Past, Stellenbosch University; University of Rochester Democracy Center; Yale-UB Historical Political Economy Workshop, Barcelona, Spain; Institutions, Individual Behavior and Economic Outcome (IB EO), Alghero, Italy; NBER Summer Institute, Science of Science Funding Meeting; Political Economy of Europe APSA Pre-Conference; APSA; Monash-Warwick-Zurich-CEPR Text-as-Data Workshop; University of British Columbia Economics Department; Seminar on State and Capitalism, Center for European Studies at Harvard University; Economic History Seminar, NYU Stern School of Business; Text-as-Data Speaker Series (TADA); CESifo, Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich; University of Cologne Economics Department; Zurich Workshop in AI and Economics.
- 2023 Selected to present at the Northeast Workshop in Empirical Political Science (NEWEPS), Cambridge, MA; American Political Science Association Meeting, Los Angeles, CA; Political Networks, Los Angeles, CA; PolMeth (Political Methodology) Conference, Palo Alto, CA; Council for European Studies Conference, Reykjavík, Iceland; Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, IL; Public Choice Society Meeting, Seattle, WA