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DOCTORAL STUDIES

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)
PhD, Economics, Expected completion June 2018
DISSERTATION: "Essays on Political Economy and Elections in Africa"

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE AND REFERENCES

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Professor Tavneet Suri
MIT Sloan School of Management
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PRIOR EDUCATION

Sciences Po Paris / Ecole Polytechnique / ENSAE 2010
Master in Economics and Public Policy, *summa cum laude*

Columbia University 2009
Master of International Affairs

Sciences Po Paris 2009
Master in Public Affairs, *summa cum laude*

CITIZENSHIP

France

GENDER: Male

LANGUAGES

English (fluent), French (fluent), German (proficient)

FIELDS	Primary Fields: Political Economy, Development Secondary Field: Econometrics	
TEACHING EXPERIENCE	14.74/740 Foundations of Development Policy Teaching Assistant to Professors David Atkin and Esther Duflo	2016-17
	15.027 Opportunities in Developing Economies Teaching Assistant to Professor Tavneet Suri	2017
	14.32 Econometrics Teaching Assistant to Professor Damian Pouzo Teaching Assistant to Professor Josh Angrist (expected, 2018)	2016
RELEVANT POSITIONS	Research Assistant (Project Coordinator) to Rachel Glennerster (MIT) and Tavneet Suri (MIT Sloan) MIT J-PAL, Cambridge, MA	2011-13
	Research Assistant (Project Associate) to Rachel Glennerster (MIT) and Tavneet Suri (MIT Sloan) Innovations for Poverty Action, Freetown, Sierra Leone	2010-11
FELLOWSHIPS, HONORS, AND AWARDS	MIT Economics Undergraduate Teaching Assistant of the Year	2016
	Research Grants for “A Market Equilibrium Approach to Reduce the Incidence of Vote-Buying” (with Horacio Larreguy, Otis Reid, and Chris Blattman) J-PAL Governance Initiative (\$303,000) Vanguard Charitable Trust (\$130,000) International Growth Centre (£126,779)	2015
	Research Grants for “Informing and Mobilizing Voters by Text Message: Evidence from a Countrywide Experiment in Kenya” (with Vincent Pons and Tavneet Suri) J-PAL Governance Initiative (\$53,000) MIT Sloan School of Management (\$100,000)	2013
	Research Grant for “The Growth Impacts of Diamond Mining in Sierra Leone” (with Tavneet Suri) International Growth Centre (£14,000)	2012
PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES	Refereeing: <i>American Economic Review, American Political Science Review, American Economic Journal: Applied Economics, Econometrica, Economic Journal, Economic Development and Cultural Change, Journal of Politics, International Journal of Urban Sciences, Population and Environment, Regional Science and Urban Economics.</i>	

Seminars and Presentations: Annual APSA Meeting (2016), Fourth Annual Formal Theory and Comparative Politics Conference (2016), Harvard Government (2016), Harvard Business School BGIE Seminar (2017), Harvard Political Economy Seminar (2014), MIT Political Economy Lunch Seminar (2015-17), NEUDC Conference (2016), Working Group in African Political Economy (2013), Workshop on Urban Poverty at Duke University (2014).

Fieldwork: Kenya, Mauritius, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Uganda.

PUBLICATION

“The Economics of Slums in the Developing World”, with Thomas Stoker and Tavneet Suri, *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 27(4): 187-210.

The global expansion of urban slums poses questions for economic research as well as problems for policymakers. We provide evidence that the type of poverty observed in contemporary slums of the developing world is characteristic of that described in the literature on poverty traps. We document how human capital threshold effects, investment inertia, and a “policy trap” may prevent slum dwellers from seizing economic opportunities offered by geographic proximity to the city. We test the assumptions of another theory – that slums are just a transitory phenomenon characteristic of fast-growing economies – by examining the relationship between economic growth, urban growth, and slum growth in the developing world, and whether standards of living of slum dwellers are improving over time, both within slums and across generations. Finally, we discuss why standard policy approaches have often failed to mitigate the expansion of slums in the developing world. Our aim is to inform public debate on the essential issues posed by slums in the developing world.

RESEARCH PAPERS

“Elections as Incentives: Project Completion and Visibility in African Politics” (Job Market Paper).

This paper estimates the disciplining effect of elections on politicians in Sub-Saharan Africa. Using subnational electoral data from 61 African national elections, I first show that the completion of development projects funded by the World Bank and implemented by governments between 1995 and 2014 yields large electoral benefits for incumbent politicians. The causal effect of completion is identified from an instrumental variables strategy that exploits exogenous variation in the workload of project team leaders at the World Bank. Incumbents are rewarded for completing projects in visible sectors, namely projects providing basic infrastructure and social services, but not for completing projects in other sectors. Using a second instrument that predicts the timing of elections based on pre-determined constitutional rules, I then show that governments expedite completion in response to electoral incentives, target their effort towards visible projects, and prioritize completing ongoing projects over initiating new projects before elections. These effects are not driven by intertemporal substitution of government effort across the electoral cycle. Finally, I provide evidence that democratic institutions reduce delays for visible projects on aggregate. Even in Africa’s hybrid regimes, elections incentivize politicians to deliver tangible policy outputs.

“There Is No Free House: Ethnic Patronage in a Kenyan Slum” (with Thomas Stoker and Tavneet Suri). Revise and Resubmit, *AEJ: Applied*.

Using unique data from one of Africa’s largest informal settlements, the Kibera slum in Nairobi, we provide evidence of ethnic patronage in the determination of rental prices and investments. Slum residents pay higher rents and live in lower quality housing (measured by satellite pictures) when the landlord and the locality chief belong to the same tribe. Conversely, rental prices are lower and investments higher when residents and chiefs are co-ethnics. Our identification strategy relies on the exogenous appointment of chiefs and is supported by several tests, including a regression discontinuity design.

“The Perils of Voter Mobilization” (with Vincent Pons and Tavneet Suri). NBER Working Paper No. 23946.

Voter mobilization campaigns face trade-offs in young democracies. In a large-scale experiment implemented in 2013 with the Kenyan Electoral Commission (IEBC), text messages intended to mobilize voters boosted participation but also decreased trust in electoral institutions after the election, a decrease that was stronger in areas that experienced election-related violence, and for individuals on the losing side of the election. The mobilization backfired because the IEBC promised an electronic voting system that failed, resulting in manual voting and tallying delays. Using a simple model, we show that signaling high institutional capacity via a mobilization campaign can negatively affect beliefs about the fairness of the election.

“A Signaling Theory of Distributive Policy Choice: Evidence from Senegal” (with Jessica Gottlieb, Guy Grossman, and Horacio Larreguy). Revise and Resubmit, *Journal of Politics*.

A recent literature emphasizes political economy factors behind the wave of administrative splits across the developing world. While past studies have focused on why some groups are more likely to obtain new administrative units, they do not explain why vote-maximizing incumbents use this arguably wasteful policy in the first place. We contribute to this literature by embedding administrative unit splits within incumbents' broader electoral strategy of distributive policies. We argue that incumbents prefer to target local public goods to groups for whom this is a credible signal of commitment, namely those with a history of a reciprocal relationship. Other groups require a stronger signal which, we argue, is provided by the creation of new administrative units that entail an increase in stable fiscal transfers due to the stickiness of administrative boundaries. We test our signaling theory using the case of Senegal and find robust support for its core predictions.

“A Market Equilibrium Approach to Reduce the Incidence of Vote-Buying” (with Horacio Larreguy, Otis Reid, and Chris Blattman).

We estimate the effects of a large-scale, randomized grassroots campaign designed to reduce vote-buying in the 2016 election in Uganda. Our design and data collection allow us to estimate how candidates and their brokers respond to the campaign in treatment and spillover areas and how the effects of the campaign vary with local treatment intensity. Contrary to our expectations, the campaign did not reduce the extent to which voters accepted cash and gifts in exchange for

their vote. However, it led opposition candidates to increase their vote-buying and policy-campaigning efforts, and it had sizeable effects on electoral outcomes, with opposition candidates benefiting from the campaign at the expense of incumbent candidates. Consistent with these effects, we present evidence that the campaign diminished the effectiveness of vote-buying transactions by shifting local social norms against vote-selling and by convincing some voters to vote their conscience, regardless of any gifts received.

“Diversity and Team Performance in a Kenyan Organization” (with Vincent Pons and Tavneet Suri). Harvard Business School Working Paper No. 16-078.

We present the results from a field experiment on team diversity. Individuals working as door-to-door canvassers for a non-profit organization were randomly assigned a teammate, a senior manager, and a set of households to visit. This created random variation within the organization in the degree of horizontal diversity between teammates, vertical diversity between teammates and their manager, and external diversity between teams and their clients. We find that horizontal ethnic diversity decreases team performance, while vertical diversity improves performance, and external diversity has no effect. The data on time use suggest that horizontally homogeneous teams organized tasks in a more efficient way, while vertically homogeneous teams exerted lower effort.

**RESEARCH IN
PROGRESS**

“Discretionary Funds and Dynamic Corruption Incentives: Evidence from Africa.”

Previous studies of corruption have found evidence of “golden goose” effects: higher expected future rents may result in a short-term decrease in theft. This theory implies that politicians choose an upward-sloping corruption profile over their careers, even in the absence of term limits. I provide preliminary evidence of this phenomenon using survey data on perceptions of MP corruption in Sub-Saharan Africa. Opportunities for corruption in this setting arise from the adoption of Constituency Development Funds – political funds allocated using rigid rules which are spent at the discretion of local MPs. To construct a measure of potential rents, I exploit the malapportionment of the voting population across constituencies, which creates variation in the amount of discretionary funds available per capita. I find that perceived corruption decreases for first-term MPs and increases for multiple-term MPs. Consistent with this, incumbent MPs with access to larger discretionary funds are more likely to win re-election.

“Islamic Institutions, Elites, and Structural Change: Evidence from Indonesia” (with Samuel Bazzi and Gabriel Koehler-Derrick).

We exploit the aborted Indonesian land reform of 1960 to estimate the long-term economic impact of an institution present throughout the Islamic world – the *waqf*. In Islamic law, the *waqf* (plural *awqaf*) is an inalienable religious endowment established to encourage the provision of public goods and charitable services in perpetuity. Kuran (2001) argues this institution was a major factor leading to economic stagnation in predominantly Muslim societies because it hindered the reallocation of capital in periods of structural change. We provide evidence that in anticipation of the planned land redistribution, landowners with holdings above the maximum threshold allowed by the 1960 Agrarian Law

transferred a large fraction of their land into *waqf* status to avoid seizure by the local government. We use plausibly exogenous regional variation in the intensity of the planned reform to identify the effect of *awqaf* on long-term agricultural and economic development, and to test Kuran's hypothesis on the relationship between *awqaf* and resource misallocation.

“Pre-Colonial Institutions, Ethnic Voting and Clientelism in Sub-Saharan Africa” (with Horacio Larreguy).

A recent literature shows that pre-colonial political centralization fosters public goods provision in contemporary Sub-Saharan Africa. In this paper, we show that differences in public goods provision across areas with varying levels of pre-colonial centralization results from larger transfers of resources from governments, in exchange for electoral support, in areas where chiefs have a historical advantage in mobilizing their communities. We first provide a simple model where an incumbent politician garners support through targeted transfers. The electoral efficiency of these transfers depends on the ability of chiefs to mobilize voters and increases when these are co-ethnics of the incumbent. We successfully test the predictions of the model using a newly constructed constituency-level dataset combining electoral outcomes and satellite lights from 35 Sub-Saharan African countries.