

**AUGUSTIN BERGERON**  
[www.augustinbergeron.com](http://www.augustinbergeron.com)  
[augustinbergeron@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:augustinbergeron@fas.harvard.edu)

**HARVARD UNIVERSITY**

Placement Director: Amanda Pallais	APALLAIS@FAS.HARVARD.EDU	617-495-2151
Placement Director: Elie Tamer	ELIETAMER@FAS.HARVARD.EDU	617-496-1526
Assistant Director: Brenda Piquet	BPIQUET@FAS.HARVARD.EDU	617-495-8927

**Office Contact Information:**

1805 Cambridge Street  
Cambridge, MA 02138  
857-928-5277

**Personal Information:**

Citizenship: France

**Doctoral Studies:**

Harvard University, 2015 to present  
Ph.D. Candidate in Political Economy and Government (Economics Track)  
Thesis Title: “Essays in Development and Public Economics”  
Expected Completion Date: May 2021

**References:**

Professor Nathan Nunn (Chair)  
Harvard University  
617-496-4958  
[nunn@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:nunn@fas.harvard.edu)

Professor Asim Khwaja  
Harvard Kennedy School  
617-384-7790  
[khwaja@hks.harvard.edu](mailto:khwaja@hks.harvard.edu)

Professor Raj Chetty  
Harvard University  
510-502-9532  
[chetty@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:chetty@fas.harvard.edu)

Professor Edward Glaeser  
Harvard University  
617-495-0575  
[eglaeser@harvard.edu](mailto:eglaeser@harvard.edu)

**Prior Studies:**

B.A. in Economics, École Normale Supérieure Ulm, Paris, 2011  
MSc. in Political Economy of Development, London School of Economics, 2012  
M.A. in Economics, Paris School of Economics, 2014

**Teaching and Research Fields:**

Primary fields: Development Economics, Public Economics  
Secondary fields: Political Economy, Economic History

**Teaching Experience:**

2018-2020	Poverty and Development (Ec 1393), Teaching fellow for Prof. Nathan Nunn
2018-2020	Comparative Historical Economic Development (Ec 2325), Teaching fellow for Prof. Nathan Nunn

## **Working Papers:**

[“The State Capacity Ceiling on Tax Rates: Evidence from Randomized Tax Abatements in the D.R. Congo”](#) (with Gabriel Tourek and Jonathan Weigel). **Job Market Paper**

**Abstract:** How can developing countries increase the tax revenue they collect? In collaboration with the Provincial Government of Kasai-Central, we evaluate an experiment in the D.R. Congo that randomly assigned 38,028 property owners to different property tax liabilities. We find that status quo tax rates are above the revenue-maximizing (Laffer) tax rate. Reducing the tax rate by approximately 34% would maximize government revenue by increasing tax compliance. We then investigate how responses to tax rates interact with enforcement. We exploit two sources of variation in enforcement – randomized enforcement letters and random assignment of tax collectors – and show that the Laffer rate increases with enforcement. Replacing tax collectors in the bottom 25th percentile of enforcement capacity by average collectors would raise the Laffer rate by 42%. Tax rates and enforcement are thus complementary levers. According to our estimates, a government that adjusts tax rates and increases enforcement independently would increase revenue by 61%, while a government that takes their complementarity into account and adjusts both optimally would instead raise revenue by 77%. These findings provide experimental evidence that low government enforcement capacity sets a binding ceiling on the Laffer tax rate in some developing countries, thereby demonstrating the value of increasing tax enforcement in tandem with tax rates in countries seeking to expand their fiscal capacity.

[“Local Elites as State Capacity: How City Chiefs Use Local Information to Increase Tax Compliance in the D.R. Congo”](#) (with Pablo Balán, Gabriel Tourek, and Jonathan Weigel). **CEPR Working Paper**. Revise and resubmit, *American Economic Review*

**Abstract:** Historical states with low capacity often delegated tax collection to local elites, despite the risk of mismanagement. Could this strategy raise revenues without undermining government legitimacy in fragile states today? We provide evidence from a randomized policy experiment assigning neighborhoods of a Congolese city — spanning 45,162 properties — to tax collection by state agents or by city chiefs. Chief collection raised property tax compliance by 3.3 percentage points, increasing revenues by 43%. Although chiefs collected more bribes, we find no evidence of mismanagement or backlash on other margins. Results from a hybrid treatment arm in which state agents consulted with chiefs before collection suggest that chief collectors achieved higher compliance by using local information to more efficiently target households with high payment propensities, rather than by being more effective at persuading households to pay conditional on having visited them.

[“Religion and the Scope of Cooperation: Evidence from Exposure to Missions in the DRC”](#)

**Abstract:** Across the social sciences, a key question is whether religion facilitates cooperation and pro-social behavior. In this paper, I examine if religion has long-term effects on individuals' "scope of cooperation", defined as the extent to which individuals (i) favors kins (family members and coethnics) over non-kins, (ii) adopt communal (rather than universal) moral values. To study the relationship between religion and scope of cooperation, I use archival records on the location of European Christian missions, novel survey questions, and a lab-in-the-field referral experiment conducted with over 1,000 respondents in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I find that

exposure to Christian missions is associated with weaker kinship ties and less communal (i.e., more universal) moral values. As a placebo test, I show that missions abandoned for idiosyncratic reasons don't have such effects. Finally, I show evidence that part of Christian missions' enduring effect is explained by the formation of a cross-cutting Christian identity, which also engenders a bias against non-Christian individuals.

[“Land Formalization in Weak States: Experimental Evidence from Urban Property Titling in the D.R. Congo”](#) (with Pablo Balán, Gabriel Tourek, and Jonathan Weigel)

**Abstract:** Despite the importance of property rights in institutionalist models of development, there remain important gaps in knowledge about land titling in urban settings. We study a randomized land titling program that cuts the ticket price of formal land titles by 90% and reduces the transaction costs of acquiring a title. The program increases demand for land titles by 44 percentage points and causes a 13.7 percentage-point increase in the acquisition of titles. Exploiting randomized subsidies, we estimate an elasticity of demand for land titles of -0.42. Examining heterogeneous take up, we find higher demand among individuals with higher-value properties, more income, and more education. We also find that take up is highest within the footprint of the former colonial city of Luluabourg and lowest in parts of the city still under customary authority. Finally, we present evidence of short-run effects of urban titling. Although we find no evidence of increases in tenure security, investment, or access to credit, we show suggestive evidence that the program crowded out engagement with informal institutions within local communities. Overall, the results support the idea that the formal state and local, informal forms of governance and social insurance may function as substitutes.

[“Fiscal Contracts? A Six-Country Randomized Experiment on Transaction Costs, Public Services, and Taxation in Developing Countries”](#) (with Ana de La O et al.)

**Abstract:** We present results from six randomized controlled trials designed to promote formalization and tax payments in low and middle-income countries. Each randomized intervention used in-person visits, during which citizens received information about the government benefits that come with formalization and assistance undertaking one of three types of formalization (business registration, property regularization, and access to public services). A meta-analysis shows that the average effect of these interventions on citizens' intent to formalize, formalization, and tax payment is indistinguishable from zero. Still, we find substantial heterogeneity across sites. A reduction in upfront transaction costs increases citizens' intention to formalize when governments offer tangible individual benefits in exchange for formalization but not when benefits are diffuse or collective. Bureaucratic barriers thwarted willing citizens' formalization efforts, and only a fraction of those who formalized ultimately paid more taxes. The results underscore the difficulty of regularizing taxation and service provision in low- and middle-income countries.

### **Publications:**

[“Income Concentration in British India, 1885-1946”](#) (with Facundo Alvaredo and Guilhem Cassan), *Journal of Development Economics*, 127: 459-469, 2017.

[“The Association between Income and Life Expectancy in the United States, 2001-2014”](#) (with Raj Chetty, Michael Stepner, Sarah Abraham, Shelby Lin, Ben Scuderi, Nick Turner, and David

Cutler), *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, 315(16): 1750-1766, 2016.

**Research Papers in Progress:**

“Tax Collection and Bureaucrat Performance: Experimental Evidence from the DRC” (with Gabriel Tourek and Jonathan Weigel). *Field work completed.*

“The Effects of Decentralized Tax Collection on Citizen Engagement” (with Gabriel Tourek, Laura Paler, and Jonathan Weigel). *Field work completed.*

“Quality and Optimal Allocation of Tax Collectors: Evidence from a Field Experiment in the D.R. Congo” (with Pedro Bessone, Gabriel Tourek and Jonathan Weigel). *Field work completed.*

“Using Machine Learning to Increase Property Tax Collection in the D.R. Congo” (with Arnaud Fournier, Gabriel Tourek and Jonathan Weigel). *Field work completed.*

“Zero-Sum Thinking, Traditional Beliefs, and Economic Development” (with Jean-Paul Carvalho, Joe Henrich, Nathan Nunn, James Robinson, and Jonathan Weigel). *Field work completed.*

“Politics and Ethnic Salience: Evidence from Change in District Boundaries in the D.R. Congo” (with Sara Lowes, Nathan Nunn, James Robinson, and Jonathan Weigel). *In the field.*

**Seminar and Conference Presentations:**

“The State Capacity Ceiling on Tax Rates: Evidence from Randomized Tax Abatements in the D.R. Congo”

RIDGE Public Economics Workshop (online, December 2020); IADB Research Econ seminar series, EconNet (online, October 2020); Oxford University Department of Economics and Nuffield College (online, October 2020); World Bank Tax Conference: Taxing Personal Income and Wealth in Developing Countries (online, September 2020); DEVPEC (online, September 2020); FSU applied workshop (online, September 2020); 19th Summer School in International and Development Economics (online, September 2020); Virtual NBER/BREAD Conference on Development Economics (online, May 2020); PacDev (online, March 2020); NBER Junior Researcher Talks (NBER, Cambridge, MA, November 2019); NTA annual conference (Tampa, FL, November 2019); NEUDC, Northwestern University (Evanston, IL, October 2019).

“Local Elites as State Capacity: How City Chiefs Use Local Information to Increase Tax Compliance in the D.R. Congo”

University of Michigan Health, History, Demography and Development, H2D2, Research Day (online, March 2020); Paris School of Economic Applied Microeconomic Seminar (Paris, January 2020); 4th Zurich Conference on Public Finance in Developing Countries (Zurich, December 2019).

“Religion and the Scope of Cooperation: Evidence from Exposure to Missions in the DRC”

NEUDC, Dartmouth College (online, November 2020); NBER Summer Institute DEA poster session (online, July 2020); ASREC virtual graduate student workshop (Online, May 2020); PacDev, University

of California Berkeley (online, March 2020); CRED / DeFipp Workshop, University of Namur (Namur, January 2020).

**Research Grants:**

- 2020 J-PAL Africa Digital Identification and Finance Initiative (\$68,992)
- 2020 International Growth Center (\$87,295)
- 2020 International Center for Tax and Development (\$23,772)
- 2019 International Growth Center Small Project Facility (\$19,700)
- 2019 Innovations for Poverty Action, Research Method Initiative (\$8,000)
- 2019 Harvard Lab for Economic Applications and Policy (\$16,000)
- 2019 Google Cloud Platform machine learning research grant (\$5,000)
- 2019 Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab Governance Initiative (\$46,745)
- 2019 International Center for Tax and Development (\$25,360)
- 2019 J-PAL Africa Digital Identification and Finance Initiative (\$10,000)
- 2019 International Center for Tax and Development (\$120,000)
- 2019 Initiative for Poverty Action Peace and Recovery Program (\$10,000)
- 2019 Pershing Square Fund for Research on the Foundations of Human Behavior (\$5,000)
- 2018 Initiative for Poverty Action Peace and Recovery Program (\$50,000)
- 2018 International Center for Tax and Development (\$28,000)
- 2017 Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab Governance Initiative (\$50,000)
- 2017 EGAP Metaketa II. Taxation initiative (\$272,000)

**Honors, Scholarships, and Fellowships:**

- 2020 Harvard IQSS Jeanne Humphrey Block Dissertation Award
- 2019 Harvard Professional Development Award
- 2019 Harvard Weatherhead Center Mid-Dissertation Award
- 2019 Harvard Warburg Research Award
- 2018 Harvard John C. Hansen and Katherine Vogelheim Research and Travel Award
- 2015-21 Harvard University Graduate Research Fellowship

**Affiliations:**

Institute for Quantitative Social Sciences (IQSS), Graduate Student Affiliate  
Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Graduate Student Affiliate  
Evidence for Policy Design (EPoD), Graduate Student Affiliate

**Professional Activities:**

Referee: *Journal of Public Economics*, *Journal of Development Economics*, *World Bank Economic Review*