I am an applied microeconomist and political economist. My scholarship focuses on three broad topics: (i) causes and effects of migration and displacement, (ii) social and behavioral effects of elections, and (iii) institutional and cultural foundations of development. Building on the work in my doctoral dissertation, my research agenda combines applied econometrics, economic history, and economic theory—often using quasi-experimental variation generated by mass migrations and political shocks to study how factors such as demography, identity, and information shape economic and political outcomes. My overarching research goals are to shed light on how societies coordinate economic activity, select institutions, and provide public goods.

This research has led to publications in several top journals, including the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, the *Review of Economic Studies*, the *Economic Journal*, the *Journal of Public Economics*, and the *Journal of Economic History*. Recently published papers of mine include the empirical Bazzi, Ferrara, Fiszbein, Pearson, and Testa (2023) on the internal migrations of White Americans from the U.S. South to the North and West during the early 20th century and their effects on policy coalitions in national politics; and the theoretical Skaperdas and Testa (2025) on the role of national identity among modern states in facilitating broad-based taxation and public investment. Other papers of mine that are recently accepted at top general interest journals include Bazzi, Ferrara, Fiszbein, Pearson, and Testa (2025), which examines minor postbellum migrations involving members of Southern elite, including former slaveholders, and their outsized political and cultural influence across the American West; and Testa and Williams (2025) on the link between local political outcomes and racial violence in the post-Reconstruction South.

Agenda 1: Migration and Displacement

Current United Nations estimates place the world number of international migrants at over 300 million, and the number of *forced* migrants worldwide—displaced by war, violence, and other causes—at over 120 million. Indeed, we live in a time of unprecedented human mobility, transforming the composition of populations across the world's nations and driving economic and political change around the globe. The largest share of my research agenda is dedicated to studying the political economy of migration and displacement, including its causes and consequences.

Forced migration and development. My research on forced migration demonstrates how violent displacement can reverberate through origin economies for generations. In "The Economic Legacy of Expulsion: Lessons from Post-war Czechoslovakia" (Testa 2021), I study the expulsion of roughly three million German-speaking individuals from the Czech Sudetenland after the Second World War. Using the discontinuity in ethnic composition along the Sudetenland's historical boundary for identification, I show that the expulsion created persistent gaps in population density, sectoral composition, and educational attainment. The expulsion did not merely replace Germans with Czechs; rather, it set in motion selective resettlements and capital extraction that culminated in long-run urban decay and human-capital decline. This work was initially a chapter in my dissertation. Now cited more than 55 times, it constitutes a major contribution to the literature on forced migration and development.

A working project, "The Geography of Demographic Composition in the United States" with Bazzi, Chyn, Ferrara, Fiszbein, and Pearson, investigates historical expulsion events in the context of the United States. Many such episodes of displacement are well known, including the Tulsa Race Massacre. At the same time, numerous smaller yet no less important episodes remain poorly understood if not forgotten. Using OpenAI's GPT-5 LLM, we are currently parsing millions of newspaper articles for references to such events. By combining those records with full-count U.S. Census data, we will build a novel, comprehensive database of minority expulsion across U.S. towns between 1850 and 1940 and, in turn, study the effects of these events on both the places and people involved. This work is funded by grants by the National Science Foundation and the Russell Sage Foundation, alongside several smaller sources. We anticipate that we will have the dataset constructed by summer 2026, at which point we will begin the full analysis.

Voluntary migration and political change. Waves of voluntary migration have repeatedly shaped politics and culture in the United States over its history. In "The Other Great Migration: Southern Whites and the New Right" (Bazzi, Ferrara, Fiszbein, Pearson, Testa 2023), we show how millions of White migrants leaving the U.S. South during the 20th century reshaped the electoral landscape nationwide. These migrants tended to be racially and religiously conservative, and their arrival outside the South expanded the conservative voter base, hastening partisan realignment and bolstering the nascent New Right movement during the second half of the century. Beyond just augmenting the electorate, migrant communities influenced non-Southerners by building evangelical churches, diffusing new forms of media, and intermarrying with local populations. For identification, we use a shift-share instrumental variable approach, based on historical migration flows and individual linking across U.S. Census data. Because it speaks to ongoing debates about political realignment and the geography of conservatism, the paper has garnered wide media coverage, including in *The Economist*, *NPR*, and the *Washington Post*, and currently has 90 citations.

Data infrastructure for scientists. To further facilitate research on spatial dynamics, I worked with colleagues to develop a publicly-available set of county-to-county and county-to-congressional district crosswalks (Ferrara, Testa, Zhou 2024). To improve upon area-based weights used in prior crosswalks, which may misallocate population flows when urbanization is heterogeneous, we also produce population-based weights for mapping county-level data across Censuses as well as counties to congressional districts. These crosswalks match official Census data more closely than those using area-based weights. The dataset is already being used by researchers and policymakers to study demographic change, voting patterns, and economic development.

Agenda 2: Elections as Social Signals

Elections select officeholders and policies, but they also signal to political actors where to invest their time and money. My second—and the newest—research agenda studies how elections shape social and political outcomes through the information that they convey.

A new working paper, "Elections and Political Investment," explores how election results shape the allocation of political investment (e.g., by donors, activists). In the model, political investors seek to allocate resources where expected political fundamentals favor their party. Investors possess idiosyncratic local knowledge but also public information in the form of recent election results. These signals are complementary: where local knowledge is great, even the smallest majority can align beliefs and concentrate investment where returns are highest. I then apply this framework to the changing political geography of the United States between 1940 and 1972, when urban and minority areas came into play for the Democratic Party. A regression discontinuity design based on close presidential elections shows that counties narrowly won by Democrats saw pronounced increases in Democratic local officeholding and voter support in subsequent election periods. This does not reflect direct impacts of presidential elections on local offices, but rather indirect shifts through political investment, including heightened activity in newspaper advertising, phone banking, and civil rights mobilization.

This work closely follows Testa and Williams (2025), "Political Foundations of Racial Violence in the Post-Reconstruction South," forthcoming at the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*. Using records of county-level political competition and lynchings between 1880 and 1900, we argue that local electoral incentives underpinned patterns of racial violence in the post-Reconstruction U.S. South. Where Democrats lost the presidential vote, local elite responded by amplifying narratives of Black-committed crime. These stories tended to precipitate local lynching events, pointing to the strategic use of racial violence by Democratic elites in response to the threat of Black power.

Agenda 3: Institutions and Culture

My third research strand explores the microfoundations of institutions and culture, as well as how culture and beliefs interact with formal institutions to influence development. A common theme throughout this research is that cultural norms are neither independent of economics, nor do they merely reflect local economic conditions; rather, they are often shaped and wielded by political and economic elites as instruments to solve collective-action problems, provide social insurance, and sustain regimes.

Migration and culture in the United States. Migrants carry their culture with them as they move. While they often assimilate into local norms and practices, migrants sometimes preserve cultural traditions across generations and influence their new communities. Debates about immigration, past and present, often hinge on the balance between cultural assimilation and influence. "The

Confederate Diaspora" (Bazzi, Ferrara, Fiszbein, Pearson, Testa 2025), which is accepted at the *Review of Economic Studies*, provides a framework for understanding how migrants have historically shaped culture and institutions in their destinations. For empirical evidence, we examine a wave of migration involving around 1 million former Confederate households, including former slaveholders, in the decades following the Civil War. We identify short- and long-run effects on the institutions and cultural norms, which sprung up and persisted across the country in places where those migrants settled.

Public goods, identity, and institutions. In "Education and Propaganda: Tradeoffs to Public Education Provision in Nondemocracies" (Testa 2018), I show how autocratic regimes face a tension when investing in public education: schooling builds human capital and expands the tax base, but it also nurtures political sophistication and participation, threatening the regime. I show theoretically that regimes can relax this trade-off by disseminating propaganda through the education system. Propaganda deters political opposition, thus potentially inducing nondemocracies to invest in education when they otherwise would not. However, if propaganda is too strong, it can backfire by galvanizing opposition. Though this paper appeared in my dissertation, it was already accepted in the *Journal of Public Economics* by the time that I received my Ph.D. The paper contributes to the literature on the political economy of education and speaks to current debates about misinformation and state control of curricula.

More recently in "National Identity, Public Goods, and Modern Economic Development" (Skaperdas and Testa 2025), we argue that the emergence of national identity was pivotal for modern states' ability to provide public goods. Using a model of elites and commoners with heterogeneous group identities (for example, ethnic or class differences), we show that elites have incentives to encourage national identification insofar as a shared identity reduces conflict over the distribution of economic resources, allowing more taxes to be collected. This effect is self-reinforcing: increased public goods provision, we argue, raises the economic prestige of the nation and thus increases the psychological returns to national identification. As in Testa (2018), this paper shows how culture and identity can be leveraged to solve problems of public good provision in developing polities.

Religion and social insurance. Ferrara and Testa (2023) show how religious communities often provide informal forms of social insurance. We find that the economic risk associated with oil price volatility encouraged the proliferation of churches in the 20th century U.S. South. These churches in turn limited spillovers of negative oil price shocks by reducing unemployment growth. Importantly, known oil abundance predicts church membership, but the effect is not driven by selective migration or local economic growth associated with oil discoveries. Instead, greater access to credit or formal insurance crowds out the effect, consistent with a social-insurance mechanism. This project links religious institutions and economic volatility, showing how the former can substitute for formal insurance in places where markets are relatively incomplete.