

# Max Winkler

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## EDUCATION

- University of Zurich*, Ph.D. in Economics. 2014-2020  
Thesis Title: Essays in Historical Economic Development.  
Visiting Student at Harvard University (2018-2020)  
Visiting Researcher at the London School of Economics (2020)
- Barcelona Graduate School of Economics*, M.Sc in Economics. 2013
- University of St. Gallen*, Bachelor's Degree in International Affairs. 2012
- University of St. Gallen*, Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration. 2012

## ACADEMIC POSITIONS

- Harvard University*, Postdoctoral Fellow. 2020 to present

## RESEARCH FIELDS

- Primary Fields: Development Economics, Economic History.  
Secondary Fields: Political Economy, Cultural Economics.

## REFERENCES

- Professor Ernst Fehr (University of Zurich)  
Phone: +41-44-634-3709, Email: [ernst.fehr@econ.uzh.ch](mailto:ernst.fehr@econ.uzh.ch)
- Professor Joseph Henrich (Harvard University)  
Phone: +1-617-384-8640, Email: [henrich@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:henrich@fas.harvard.edu)
- Professor Nathan Nunn (Harvard University)  
Phone: +1-617-496-5079, Email: [nunn@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:nunn@fas.harvard.edu)
- Professor David Yanagizawa-Drott (University of Zurich)  
Phone: +41-44-634-6131, Email: [david.yanagizawa-drott@econ.uzh.ch](mailto:david.yanagizawa-drott@econ.uzh.ch)

## TEACHING

- Programming Practices for Research in Economics (graduate)* 2016, 2017  
Instructor, University of Zurich
- Program Evaluation and Causal Inference (graduate)* 2016, 2017  
Teaching Assistant for Prof. Pietro Biroli, University of Zurich.
- Development Economics (undergraduate)* 2015  
Teaching Assistant for Prof. Joachim Voth, University of Zurich.

## RESEARCH PAPERS

### *Do Disasters Affect Adherence to Social Norms?*

(Job Market Paper)

Universally, social norms prescribe behavior and attitudes, but societies differ widely in how strictly individuals adhere to the norms and punish those who do not. This paper shows that collective traumatic experiences, henceforth “disasters”, lead to stricter adherence to social norms. To establish this result, I combine data on the occurrences of conflicts, epidemics, and natural and economic disasters with the World Value Surveys and European Social Surveys. I use this data set to estimate the effect of disasters on norm adherence in two ways: (i) investigating event-studies that compare individuals interviewed in the days before and after the same disaster; and (ii) examining variation in individuals’ past exposure to disasters across countries and cohorts while controlling for country-, cohort-, and life-cycle-specific factors. The event-studies demonstrate that disasters strengthen adherence to social norms by 11 percent. The analysis of cross-country variation shows that the effect is long-lasting, often for several decades. Consistent with a model in which social coordination is beneficial when disasters threaten the success of entire groups, the effect of disasters on norm adherence is more pronounced in low-income countries, where survival is less secure. The results suggest that past exposure to disasters partially explains within-group cohesion and, if groups have different norms, between-group divides.

### *Political Threat and Racial Propaganda: Evidence from the U.S. South*

(with Sebastian Ottinger)

Can politics motivate propaganda in media? This paper examines the case of the unexpected and short-lived electoral success of the pro-redistribution Populist Party in the 1892 presidential elections. The Populists sought support among poor farmers, regardless of race. This biracial alliance threatened the Democratic establishment in the South, providing it with an incentive to fan racial fears to split the newly formed coalition. Newspapers affiliated with the Democrats spread propaganda of attacks by Blacks on the White community, often involving allegations of sexual assault. Using novel newspaper data, we identify these hate stories and show that they become more prevalent in the years following the 1892 presidential election in counties where the Populists were active. The effect is large and found in newspapers affiliated with the Democrats only. The evidence suggests that the propaganda ‘worked’: where newspapers spread more propaganda, the Democrats see stronger gains in presidential elections in the following decades, long after the Populists left the political arena.

### *Traditional Belief Systems and Economic Behavior: Evidence from Beer Retailers in the Eastern DRC*

(with Lewis Dunia Butinda, Aimable Amani Lameke, Nathan Nunn, and Raul Sanchez de la Sierra)

We randomize the timing in which retailers undergo protection rituals administered by traditional doctors. We find that, for retailers who report believing in spells, the ritual reduces reported stress and corrects the perceived risk of theft. Furthermore, the ritual leads those retailers to purchase more bottles of beer, resulting in higher inventories and fewer stock-outs until weeks after the treatment, increasing sales and profits. None of these effects are found for retailers that did not believe in the efficacy of the ritual. The findings suggest that the beliefs in supernatural protection are significant enough to affect psychological well-being and economic decisions and are consistent with a view in which supernatural order substitutes for the functions of the state.

## RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

### *Recombinative Potential and Innovation*

(with Jonathan Schulz and Joseph Henrich)

We tackle the question of innovation using the lens of cultural evolutionary theory. Central to this approach is the empirical observation that innovations of all sorts arise predominately from the recombination of diverse ideas, beliefs, methods, metaphors, techniques and technologies, often

drawn from different individuals. First, we integrate an economy's *Recombinative Potential* into a standard endogenous growth model and get a straightforward prediction: populations with greater informational diversity will, *ceteris paribus*, be more innovative. Second, we test the prediction empirically. A key novelty is our measure of informational diversity at the US county level: We assume that (historically) members of the same kin network or extended family tend to share similar information and proxy families using surnames from the U.S. Censuses 1880 - 1940. Using historical US patenting data as a proxy for county-level innovation, we find that informational diversity fuels the quantity (number of patents) and quality (citations per patent) of innovation. The findings suggest that many interconnected brains with diverse sets of information are at the heart of innovation.

#### *Cultural Change: Evidence from 300 Years of U.S. Local Newspapers*

Why do cultural traits sometimes change (rapidly)? Which cultural traits are more susceptible to change? The systematic empirical analysis of such questions requires reliable measures of cultural traits at the local level and over long periods. Since standard sources do not contain such information, I have collected and geo-referenced a data set of thousands of local U.S. newspapers and apply modern tools from machine learning and natural language processing to measure culture from newspaper text. The assumption underlying this approach is that language in local newspapers reflects the local culture. Validation exercises show that the text-based measures are strongly predictive of the contemporary survey measures. The key advantage of the method is that it allows me to track local cultures back into the 18th century at daily frequency.

## PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

### *Refereeing*

Economic Journal, Journal of Development Economics, Evolutionary Human Sciences.

### *Workshops and Working Groups Organized*

Zurich Workshop in Political Economy and Development (2017, 2019, co-organized), PhD Breakfast (2017, co-organized), Reading Group in Cultural Economics (2016, 2017, co-organized). Zurich Workshop in Economics (2016, co-organized).

## AWARDS AND HONORS

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| Dissertation Fellowship, University of Zurich. | 2019-2020 |
| SNF Doc.Mobility Grant.                        | 2018-2019 |
| Swiss Study Foundation Scholarship.            | 2014-2019 |

## SEMINAR AND CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

2020: EHA Annual Conference, Florida State University Applied Micro Workshop, Harvard Economic History Lunch, Harvard Political Economy and Culture Lunch, NBER Summer Institute DEA poster session

2019: ASREC in Boston, Brown University Growth Lab Seminar, EHA Annual Conference poster session, ETH Center for Law and Economics, Harvard Economic History Lunch, Harvard Political Economy and Culture Lunch

2018: Harvard Economic History Lunch, Harvard Growth Lab, Harvard Political Economy and Culture Lunch

## OTHER EMPLOYMENT

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| McKinsey & Co, Zurich, Switzerland. Management Consulting Internship. | 2014      |
| Verium AG, Zurich, Switzerland. Private Equity Internship.            | 2013      |
| Vadian Bank AG, St. Gallen, Switzerland. Private Banking.             | 2008-2010 |
| Glas Centrum Winkler, Rottweil, Germany. Management Family Business.  | 2004-2008 |