Steve Y. Kim

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Administrative Director:	Nichole Horn	nhorn@uchicago.edu

Education

University of Chicago   *2020 – 2026 (expected)*
Ph.D. in Public Policy
- Fields: Political Economy, Development

Washington University in St. Louis   *2013 – 2017*
B.A. in Economics and Political Science

References

Prof. James A. Robinson (Chair)
University of Chicago
Harris School of Public Policy,
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Prof. Konstantin Sonin
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Job Market Paper

Political Foundations of Developmental States

Contemporary research on East Asia's economic transformation in the postwar era has demonstrated the critical role of the state in driving economic development. Yet it has failed to articulate why such developmental states emerged in East Asia and what political conditions enable or compel a state to adopt developmental policies. In this paper, I present a model of developmental states as political actors and establish a novel causal link from regime type to policy choice to economic growth. A highly democratic regime produces an idle state, politically constrained from distortionary yet pro-growth interventions in the economy. An overly autocratic regime produces a predatory state, politically compelled toward interventions that are maximally extractive and stymie growth. An intermediate regime that is moderately democratic or autocratic enables growth-enhancing interventions while curbing purely extractive interventions.

Working Papers

Does Democracy Build State Capacity?

The existence of a state capable of public goods provision cannot be taken for granted. For many low and middle-income economies today, such capacity is absent or in short supply. While some argue that narrow political representation is optimal for building state capacity, which subsequently enables economic growth, some point to a broad distribution of political power as key to long run state development. This paper develops a framework that integrates the two arguments and finds that the optimal breadth of political representation for state capacity growth widens at later stages of state capacity growth.

Works in Progress

Markets, Morals, and Democracy

On markets and democratic institutions, some scholars argue mutual reinforcement, others posit a fundamental incompatibility, and still others observe a contingent compatibility. I argue that this compatibility is endogenously determined by the salience of moral norms in economic life and the resulting strategic investments in political pluralism. In my model, cultural entrepreneurs compete in an arena of ideologies where they must allocate finite budgets between two competing ends: cultural advertising to shift the baseline moral expectations of the citizenry, and institutional suppression to raise entry barriers for rival ideologies. Because the returns to these investments are path-dependent, distinct regimes of the co-evolution emerge.

Welfare Benefits of Patrimonial Politics

Patrimonialism is a form of governance in which public office is used by a patron to distribute benefits to their clients. Conventional wisdom states that patrimonial practices are at the root of "underdevelopment" across the Global South. States in South India such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu show, however, patrimonial politics can facilitate public goods provision and improve social welfare. In this paper, I develop a model of electoral competition and public goods provision and examine the conditions under which patrimonial practices produce welfare gains. When government revenue is low and patrimonial expectations are high (i.e. patrons in public office are expected to deliver substantial benefits to their clients), public goods provision collapses. When government revenue is sufficient to provide a baseline of public goods and can withstand patrimonial pressure, the political legitimacy of patrimonial practices enables the selective provision of public goods that would otherwise be entirely absent.

Teaching Experience

Instructor

○ Political Economy of Development	Winter 2024
○ Math Camp (PhD)	Fall 2023

TA

○ Game Theory	Fall 2022
○ Applied Econometrics (PhD)	Fall 2021, Fall 2022
○ Machine Learning	Spring 2022, Spring 2023, Winter 2025
○ Principles of Microeconomics	Winter 2026

Seminars

University of Chicago & University of Illinois at Chicago	Oct 2024
Washington University in St. Louis	Jan 2026

Miscellaneous

Languages: English, Korean
Programming: Python, R
US Permanent Resident