Islam and Economic Populism: How Iranian Religious Rhetoric Evolved through the Economic Conditions of the Population
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In 1979, the administration of Iran was overthrown and in its place, the Islamic Republic of Iran was proclaimed. The event challenged understanding of what Islam is in the modern world and questioned the dominance of secular society. How did Islamic influence in Iran evolve to champion the cause of a revolution? What was the context which gave it its influence? This thesis examines the effects of Iran’s economic conditions prior to the revolution. It connects large scale modernization projects and the economic and religious histories of Iran. The comparison reveals a distinct adaptation of religious rhetoric which champions the economic adversities of the common citizen and galvanized support against economic exploitation in the country. To accurately analyze these themes, I utilize a quantitative and qualitative approach. The paper collects economic data such as growth and income inequality from international and Iranian sources. By comparing this data with the primary accounts of prominent Iranian Islamic academics, the paper bridges a connection between economic condition and religious rhetoric. It reveals how Islam becomes a means for economic justice and a defense against the disenfranchisements of modernization. The paper implicates the importance of financial well-being on the ideological outlook of a society and provides a comparison to future ideological change within a nation.

Chinese Lending to African Energy Projects
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In the last two decades, Chinese state lenders have been responsible for $153 billion in loans to African countries. Acknowledging assertions in the literature that this lending has had tangible negative effects on debt sustainability in several of those African countries, my research project analyzes the effectiveness of this lending in improving welfare through the financing of energy projects. This represents a first step in answering the broader question of whether official Chinese lending to African nations, in its current state, is worth the accompanying risks. Combining data from Horn, Reinhart, and Trebesch (2021), William & Mary’s AidData Initiative, and other macro-level datasets on national electrification, I build a comprehensive picture of Chinese lending to African energy generation projects, as well as the long-term success of those projects and their effects on national energy outcomes. My analysis will be based in part on descriptive statistics generated from my dataset and in part on an econometric analysis run on the dataset that factors in costs, energy output, and national debt and labor metrics. This research is expected to yield the result that while Chinese investment is largely effective and prioritizes sustainable energy generation projects, opportunities exist for more accommodative lending practices and greater domestic labor involvement in project implementations.

Military Justice in Chile: Exploring its Ongoing Violation of the American Convention on Human Rights
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Between 1973 and 1990, Chile was ruled by Augusto Pinochet, a military dictator known for his persecution of leftists and political opponents. Although Chile transitioned to democracy, ratified the American Convention on Human
Rights and joined the Inter-American System for the protection of human rights (IAHRS) in 1990, Pinochet’s legacy of human rights abuse lingers. This is exemplified by the Chilean military justice system’s ongoing jurisdiction over cases in which military personnel harmed civilians, which violates the Convention’s guarantee of access to competent courts and fair trials. This research fills a gap in the existing literature on this violation by exploring the following question: how do the combined structural weaknesses of the Chilean judiciary and IAHRS limit the Chilean military justice system’s compliance with the Convention? To address this question, I qualitatively analyzed the foundational documents of the Chilean judiciary and IAHRS with a focus on how vague or inconsistent language in the articles that are procedurally connected in the interactions between the two institutions overlap and create loopholes that allow for Chile’s ongoing Convention violation. This thesis argues that ambiguous and contradictory language in the articles of the Chilean and IAHRS documents involved in the referral of human rights petitions to the Inter-American Court limits compliance by jeopardizing the legitimacy of petitions against Chile for inappropriate military jurisdiction and by creating significant deterrents for those considering petitioning against Chile. As many Latin American countries were ruled by military dictatorships and have since ratified the Convention, this research could illuminate tendencies central to understanding and rooting out dictatorial legacies in the region and inform more effective collaboration between the IAHRS and its member states in addressing impunity for human rights abuse.

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While many fields of study, such as psychology and sociology, have long offered various investigations and explanations of crime, starting in the latter half of the Twentieth Century, economists have begun attempting to understand crime through an economics lens. Our research has furthered this inquiry by looking at how crime rates are driven by changes in compensation for legal work as affected by changes in state income taxes. Specifically, we examined how a four-year long increase in Illinois’s flat income tax that began in 2011 affected crime rates in the state in comparison to crime rates in similar states and nationally as well. We used a difference-in-difference analysis to understand how the change in state income tax rates led to a change in crime rates in our treatment state, Illinois, when compared to those states that represent our control group. Using data on tax rates levied in each state, crime data aggregated by the federal government, and other publicly available data to inform our analysis, we have an idea of the relationship between changes in state-level income taxation and changes in crime rates as observed in Illinois. We expect that an increase in taxation will put upward pressure on crime rates in Illinois as the returns to legal work will be comparatively decreased. The hope for such work is not necessarily to inform the conversation surrounding appropriate tax rates but to contribute to an economic model of crime. Such models empower policymakers to combat crime not as a function of some base flaw in a criminal’s humanity or cognition, but as the outcome of some malleable analysis of personal costs and benefits.

Potential Unintended Consequences of the Washington State Creative Districts Program
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Mentor: Anne Taufen, Urban Studies Program, UW Tacoma
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The Washington Creative Districts program, managed by ArtsWA, is a place-based investment strategy that offers state certification to geographically defined areas focused on cultural and creative enterprises. ArtsWA provides technical and professional assistance, marketing, and funding to certified Creative Districts to encourage localized economic development through tourism and hubs of economic activity. My research examines Washington Creative Districts policy to determine what unintended consequences may be felt by communities pursuing state certification. I identify potential unintended consequences by reviewing enacted legislation in the Revised Code of Washington, Creative Districts guidelines, academic literature, and recent Washington state employment and housing data. I find the state’s interpretation of the creative economy includes professions with high social capital, such as writers and photographers, and professions with high economic capital, such as software developers and computer programmers of the knowledge economy. This broad framing of the creative economy could result in Creative Districts using social capital of traditional artistic professions for branding while primarily courting the mobile, economic capital of the knowledge economy. I expect to find that communities pursuing state certification, some of which are in economically distressed regions, may accelerate cycles of gentrification in urban areas or introduce gentrification to rural ones, resulting in long-term resident displacement. Additional research is needed to document market, demographic, and population change trends present in Washington Creative Districts and determine if their relationship to state certification is causal or a correlation. Additional work is also needed to identify local and state policy changes that could better equip Creative Districts communities to mitigate any unintended consequences and focus state support and investment in areas of the local creative economy where it is most needed.
The Economic Impact of the Ever Given Blockage: An Event Study
Karun Thota, Senior, Economics
Mentor: Michelle Turnovsky, Economics

Chokepoints are strategic, narrow passages that connect two large areas to one another. When it comes to maritime trade, these are typically straits or canals that see high volumes of traffic because of their optimal location. In March 2021, due to a strong wind, a large container ship called the Ever Given blocked the Suez Canal, a narrow trading waterway (a maritime chokepoint) that essentially connects Europe and Asia, while also handling approximately 12% of global trade. The blockage resulted in 9.6 billion dollars of goods and services to be delayed. Furthermore, it worsened the existing supply chain constraints that were caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, this event displayed how reliant or dependent international trade is on a chokepoint and showed how easily the whole process can be disrupted because of an incident that could be considered by many as insignificant. This paper is an event study of the Ever Given blockage, which aims to see how it has impacted volume of trade between countries that are situated on either side of the Suez Canal. Using a gravity model of trade, I examine and compare the effect that the event had on the volume of trade of various countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea, with Saudi Arabia on the Asian side of the canal. The broader ambition of this paper is to stress the economic reliance of international trade, in terms of volume of trade, on major chokepoints in order to motivate us to find, create and develop alternative trading waterways that could be used at the event of future disruptions at strategic chokepoints.

A Comparison of Contact Tracing Apps and COVID-19 Control in Shenzhen and King County
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This research compares the COVID-19 control policies and the use of Contact Tracing Apps (CTAs) in Shenzhen, China, and Seattle (King County, WA). The research examines the differences between local government’s policies of pandemic control, contact tracing response, and the discrepancies between CTAs design, mechanism, and the ways of defining close contacts. This first part provides background for a better understanding of the differences in government policies and CTAs for the two metropolises. The second part of the research analyzes data available to show the effectiveness of contact tracing apps and the results of differences in government pandemic control policies and response time. Visualizations are created using existing data and construct timelines of the pandemic and usage of CTAs, demonstrating the effects of CTAs on certain indicators such as numbers of hospitalizations, people in quarantine, cases, and deaths. The timeline will be divided based on different COVID-19 mutations that were dominant in the areas, as well as the version updates on the CTAs. After analyzing the effectiveness of CTAs on pandemic control, the research explores the overall impacts of CTA, COVID-19, and government’s pandemic responses on society as a whole, including the inequalities between races, different income groups, and migrations. This research may generate insights on the possible policies and ways of utilizing CTAs that are beneficial to the pandemic control as well as the economy and residents’ daily life. Besides, as there are few studies on CTAs’ effectiveness on COVID-19 control, this study can also suggest possible directions for other researchers. In the end, the research generates visualizations that tell a story from the beginning of how the government deals with the pandemic and how their responses and CTAs had an effect on the pandemic control and the society, especially on migration and inequalities.