

Maria Montoya-Aguirre

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Education

PhD in Economics. Paris School of Economics & Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. 2022 – 2027 (expected).

Supervisor: David Margolis.

Thesis committee: Oliver Vanden Eynde, Nina Guyon.

Visiting Graduate Student – University of Chicago. Fall 2024.

Host: Chris Blattman.

MSc in Analysis and Policy in Economics. Paris School of Economics. 2019 – 2021.

BSc in Economics. Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (CIDE). 2015 – 2019.

Fields

Development Economics, Crime, Labor Economics, Political Economy

Research

Job Market Paper

[“Drug Lords in STEM”](#)

A long-standing view in economics holds that education protects against criminal involvement by improving legal labor market opportunities. But what happens when education becomes a qualification for illegal employment? I study how skill-biased technical change in illegal labor markets affects human capital investment, exploiting the synthetic drug production boom in Mexico, which created criminal demand for workers with chemistry skills. Using China’s 2019 fentanyl ban as a shock that accelerated Mexican domestic production, I compare educational outcomes in commuting zones with pre-existing synthetic drug infrastructure to those without. Water quality monitoring confirms that exposed areas exhibit the chemical signature of drug production synthesis in the following years. Exposure to synthetic drug production reduces middle school dropout by 29% and high school dropout by 8.6%, increases time spent studying, and raises tertiary enrollment in chemistry-intensive STEM programs by 6%, with no effect on other fields. These findings demonstrate that criminal opportunities can shape human capital investment towards skills specific to illegal production.

Working papers

[“Moral Force, Contagious Force: Partisanship, Leadership, and Public Health Compliance during COVID-19”](#) with  L. Guillermo Woo-Mora &  Federico Daverio-Occhini. November 2025. **Under review.**

[“Embracing modernity pays: Cadastre modernization effects on local property tax collection”](#) with  Emmanuel Chávez &  L. Guillermo Woo-Mora. November 2024.

[“Drug-led development? Organized crime and local employment in Mexico”](#)

Work in progress

[“Evaluating Demand- and Supply-Side Interventions Against Organized Crime Recruitment”](#) with Natalia Guerrero-Trinidad & Maria Micaela Sviatschi.

[“From Labs to Rivers: Environmental and Health Consequences of Mexico’s Fentanyl Boom”](#) with Sandra Aguilar-Gómez.

“DICE-MX: A Georeferenced Event-Level Dataset of Drug Interdiction and Criminal Events in Mexico”

“Algorithmic Gender Gaps: How TikTok Shapes Gender Norms Among Adolescents in El Salvador” with S. Anukriti, Lelys Dinarte-Diaz, Iva Trako & Philine Widmer.

Publications

“Filling the Gaps: Childcare Laws for Women’s Economic Empowerment” with S Anukriti, Lelys Dinarte-Diaz & Alena Sakhonchik. 2025. *AEA Papers and Proceedings* 115: 689–94.

Relevant Work experience

Research Assistant – Princeton University RPDE 2025–2026

Research Assistant – The World Bank (Development Research Group) 2021–2024.

Research Analyst – United Nations Development Programme 2021–2022.

Junior Analyst – Dateras México 2018–2019

Grants & Awards

Award: [Young Economist Award 2026](#) – European Economic Association

Research grant: Citizen Security Research Initiative 2026 – Innovations for Poverty Action (USD 72,532).

Research grant: Citizen Security Research Initiative 2026 – Innovations for Poverty Action (USD 70,861).

Research grant: [Dissertation Grant 2026](#) – Horowitz Foundation for Social Policy (USD 10,000).

Fellowship: Graduate Fellowship for Studies Abroad 2025-2027 – SECIHTI, Government of Mexico

Award: Honorable Mention, Premio Banamex de Economía 2024 (with L. Guillermo Woo-Mora & Federico Daverio-Ochinni).

Award: Honorable Mention, Victor L. Urquidi Prize in Economics 2024 - El Colegio de México (with Emmanuel Chávez & L. Guillermo Woo-Mora).

Research grant: Decentralización y Capacidades Subnacionales en América Latina y El Caribe 2023 – CAF (USD 15,000).

Research grant: Fieldwork Grant 2023, Paris School of Economics (EUR 1500)

Scholarship: Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne ED465 PhD scholarship 2022-2025

Award: National Public Finance Prize 2020, First Place – CEFPE, Mexican Chamber of Deputies (with L. Guillermo Woo-Mora and Eduardo Ortiz-Juárez)

Scholarship: Eiffel Excellence Scholarship 2020, Government of France.

Scholarship: APE Scholarship 2019, Paris School of Economics.

Conferences and Seminar Presentations

2026: *CEPR Development Economics Annual Symposium 2026-1*, Trinity College Dublin; *7th Annual Texas Economics of Crime Workshop*, University of Texas-Austin; *Princeton Workshop on Organized Crime Research and Policy*, Princeton SPIA in DC; *LSE-Chicago Conference*

on the economics of crime and justice, London School of Economics; *5th Workshop on the Economics of Crime for Junior Scholars*, Institute for Fiscal Studies; ViCE Seminar; *EEA-ESEM 2026*, University College Dublin; *EALE Conference**, Universitat de Barcelona & BSE; *LACEA-LAMES**

2025: *ASSA Annual Meeting*; *BSE Summer Forum (Public Economics)*.

2024: *LACEA-LAMES*, Universidad de la República Montevideo; *Mini-conference on the Economics of Crime*, University of Chicago

2023: *XVII RIDGE Forum & AL CAPONE Workshop on the Economics of Crime*, CAF Montevideo

* Scheduled presentations.

Teaching Experience

Teaching Assistant – Sciences Po (2025):

– Public Economics (Masters in Public Policy)

Instructor – Paris School of Economics (2023, 2025):

– Introduction to Statistical Programming in R (Masters in Analysis and Policy in Economics)

Refereeing

Journal of Development Economics, World Development.

Skills

Software: R, Python, Stata, QGIS.

Languages: Spanish (native); English (fluent); French (advanced).

References

David Margolis

Paris School of Economics &
CNRS

Professor of Economics

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Maria Micaela Sviatschi

Princeton University

Associate Professor of Economics and Public Affairs

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