

# Introducing

# Barry Maydom

Lecturer in Politics in the School of Social Sciences at Birkbeck College, University of London

**Barry Maydom is a Lecturer in Politics in the School of Social Sciences at Birkbeck College, University of London. His research focuses on the political effects of emigration in migrants' homelands, and he teaches courses on quantitative research methods and experimental research design. We spoke to Barry about his previous GLD work, his research background, and current project on how emigration shapes local social contracts in Latin America.**



**Hi Barry! Nice to have you as a GLD Fellow in 2024. I understand that you have worked with GLD before. Can you please explain more?**

Thank you! I am delighted to be a GLD Fellow this year. I was introduced to GLD through a Swedish Research Links project in 2021-22, which paired European and African academics to work together on research. I partnered with John Maara from the University of Nairobi to investigate how everyday corruption experiences affect emigration in sub-Saharan Africa. We found that paying bribes for public services – particularly to the police – is a powerful driver of emigration intentions, much more so than broader perceptions of government corruption. GLD was very supportive of our research, and the Annual Conference was a wonderful event to get feedback and meet other interesting researchers with fantastic work from around the world; I'm looking forward to getting more involved this year!

**Can you tell us more about your research background and what led you to focus on how emigration affects the social contract in migrants' homelands?**

Migrants from developing countries collectively send more than \$600bn home to their families and communities every year – more than three times the amount of development aid given to these countries. While we have reams of research into the effects of aid on political development, we are only just beginning to understand the impact of emigration and remittances. Much of my research tries to improve this gap in our knowledge of the politics of emigration. In previous work, I have found that migrant households and remittance recipients tend to be disconnected from the national political community; they turn out to vote in lower numbers and are less supportive of increasing taxes to fund public services. This is largely because migrant households are less reliant on the domestic political economy for their material well-being than those without

international connections. Migration-related disengagement from politics and the fiscal contract has important implications for political and economic development in high-migration countries. If migration reduces support for taxation, it becomes more difficult for governments to raise the revenue needed to improve public services. Migration can, therefore, contribute to the 'fiscal development trap' many developing country governments find themselves in – to improve public services, they need to raise more tax revenue, but to gain popular backing for increased taxes, they need to improve public services.

**"If we find evidence for our theory, it could offer hints about how to escape the fiscal development trap: strengthen local governance and decentralize tax-raising powers."**

**You're currently working on a project exploring how emigration shapes Latin America's local social contract. Can you briefly explain the project outline and what stage you are currently in?**

There are good reasons to believe migration and remittances might affect the local social contract differently than the national one. Receiving money from migrants abroad can insulate you from politics and the economy at the national level, but it can't disconnect you from the failures of local services in your neighbourhood. Previous studies have shown that communities with larger

emigrant populations in Latin America tend to have better local infrastructure because migrants want to invest in improving their hometowns. In my new project – in collaboration with Ana Isabel Lopez Garcia of Maastricht University – I am examining whether and how transnational connections influence the local fiscal contract. We hypothesize that remittance recipients are more willing to pay taxes at the local level to improve public services, even when they oppose the same measures at the national level. We've found initial evidence for this in existing survey data from Latin America, and we are currently designing a survey experiment to be deployed in Mexico to further explore this question. If we find evidence for our theory, it could offer hints about how to escape the fiscal development trap: strengthen local governance and decentralize tax-raising powers.

**Finally, what other projects are you working on?**

I'm currently working with the Council for At-Risk Academics to mentor a team of Syrian refugee academics who used to work at Syrian universities but were forced to flee the country as a result of the civil war. The team has received funding to carry out a project investigating the role of remittances from refugees who have fled Syria in supporting their families and communities in rebel-held northern Syria. Fieldwork was completed last year, and I'm currently helping them write up their findings for publication.

I'm also working on a project to determine the potential impact of a second Donald Trump presidency on emigration from Central America. I've found evidence from a quasi-experiment that his election win in 2016 dampened emigration intentions in Honduras and El Salvador, but mainly amongst people fleeing violence and insecurity rather than those hoping to emigrate for economic reasons. I am currently fielding a survey experiment in Honduras, examining the likely effects of Trump winning the election later this year.

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