

TRANSCRIPT OF GOVERNANCE UNCOVERED, EPISODE 50

Global Value Chains, Multiculturalism, and Civil Service Exams: Insights for Societal Progress

Hello and welcome to Governance Uncovered, a podcast brought to you by the Governance and Local Development Institute, at the University of Gothenburg. This podcast is supported by the Swedish Research Council.

In this episode, we will delve into topics of global value chains, multiculturalism, and the societal implications of civil service exams.

Guesting us is Oliver Harman and Riccardo Crescenzi, who discuss the significance of considering global value chains at the regional level:

“...the consequences of international negotiations, are again felt on the ground and can have very important implications for different localities depending on their participation into global value chains and their positions in global value chains”

Next, we're joined by Rebecca Grace Tan, who will shed light on Singapore's approach to multiculturalism and national identity:

“So Singapore national identity is primarily driven around a couple of ideas. First is this idea of multiculturalism is, or the multicultural character. Singapore is a big part of dreaming what it is to be living in Singapore. The Singapore and lived experience, but also what it means to be Singapore.”

Lastly, we have Nick Kuipers, who will discuss the impact of civil service exams on representation in municipalities and individuals' attitudes:

“... civil service exams create an unequal distribution of who gets a government job right, and this idea that minorities are going to say, lose out on government jobs under civil service exams. And one of the things that I hypothesized in this other paper in Indonesia is that against that backdrop, the experience of failing a civil service exam might motivate attitudinal changes on on, say, political resentment...”

Stay tuned as we explore these topics and gain valuable insights into regional development, multiculturalism, and unintended consequences of high-stakes exams.

First up in today's episode, we have Oliver Harman and Riccardo Crescenzi, who will be talking about their book *Harnessing Global Value Chains for regional development: How to upgrade through regional policy, FDI and Trade*. In their book, they emphasize the importance of considering global value chains at the regional or subnational level. They argue that regional development strategies should focus on identifying opportunities within the value chain and leveraging existing competencies to contribute and upgrade gradually. Coordination between local, regional, and central governments is crucial in implementing effective policies.

Oliver is a Cities Economist for the International Growth Centre's Cities that Work initiative based at Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford, and Riccardo is a Professor of Economic Geography at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

My name is Ricardo Crescenti.

And I'm Oliver Harman.

Thank you, Oliver and Ricardo. It's great to have you with us today and to talk about your book, that's really thinking about global value chains and about the importance of thinking about them at the regional or sub national level. So I very much enjoyed looking at your work and am excited about adding essentially kind of a more economic oriented component to the discussions that we often have on here. So let me just start, Oliver, by asking you to explain to those of us who are not so immersed in economics what global value chains are and why they're important?

Thank you. So global value chains, I think the best way of perhaps explaining the global value chain is with an example and the example that we often like to use and as somewhat the poster child of global value chains is the bicycle. So most people see the bicycle as sort of one final good, and indeed it once was. But in fact, the bicycle is sort of made-up of many intermediate goods produced in many varied places around the world. You know you have saddles made in Italy, you have the frame made in Vietnam, often the breaks in Japan and all these goods come together. All these intermediate goods come together and produce one final good. But that's only kind of one aspect of the global value chain. Beyond the actual production, we also have all these other related tasks and services that go into it. The research and development of the steel, for example, the design of the bicycle, the logistics and distribution of moving these parts all around the world. And then after the production, the kind of marketing as well. So that's the way that we, we see the global value chain is this full range of activities that both firms and workers perform to bring a product from its conception to its end use.

Great. Thank you. And Riccardo, maybe you can help me to understand a little bit the way that Oliver just described this thinking about what comes from Italy, what comes from China in different parts to kind of a country level. But you're also making an argument that we should think about this in terms of regional or sub-national development as well. Can you help me to understand how we might have something that we think about at a country level down to sub national levels, and also, how states and others might actually act to try to promote regional development through global value chains?

Yeah, I think it's very important to keep in mind, that the tasks, the activities that are involved at the different stages in the production of the final product. So all these intermediate stages in the production of the bike that Oliver had mentioned, touch the ground in specific localities, so the phenomena, the places where these processes happen, the type of skills, the type of competencies,

the technological infrastructure and capabilities that are leveraged to participate in global value chains are very specific of particular localities within. So when we look at participation in global value chains, we see that these chains form connections across subnational localities rather than countries as a whole. So that's why we think when we reflect about global value chains, we really need to move away from the traditional country level national level, macro understanding of the value chain. And bring it to the places to the localities where the global value chains touch the ground and interact with the real people, real infrastructure, real skills, et cetera, et cetera. So we feel that the regional perspective is somewhat missing in the standard narrative about global value chains, but it is fundamentally important to understand the phenomena. And a key tenet, a key point of our book is that thinking about intermediate goods and thinking about global value chains can offer new opportunities for regional. Maybe a country as a whole can think about producing the entire bike, but it is a lot more difficult, in particular for less developed regions within countries to think about, OK, all of a sudden, I move into the production of bikes or like electric bikes because it's an important contribution to the green transition. What we argue is that global value chains give regions the opportunity to start from a much more defined and smaller step. So look at the chain and see, OK, how can I contribute to the production of, say, electric bikes by producing a component in which I already have a set of competencies? And a sort of competitive advantage already there in my own locality that can be leveraged for me to start being part of the chain and then upgrade from there, progressively moving towards the sections of the chain that attract more value. But we feel that the shifting the focus of regional development strategies, of economic development strategies for localities away from final goods to consider also the fundamental role of intermediate goods and value chains can open a new set of developmental opportunities for regions and cities and localities across the globe.

And then do you think of this as something that is strategy and policy making and implementation at the local level or regional level, or do you think of this as sort of centrally directed? Or how do we think about where this thinking that you're talking about should be taking place and to what extent does it need to be coordinated at the central?

The challenge of what we call GVC oriented policies is certainly a challenge that also involves coordination, coordination across the different levels. So we know that global value chains touch the ground in particular localities, and we argue that global value chains can be leveraged as important tools for economic development in localities across the globe. However, localities sub national regions cannot act in isolation. The role of the central government as well as super-national organisations in the case of the EU, the coordination and the strategic role of the European Commission of the European Union is also important. So to the point that the European Commission is defining new strategies for the support of European value chains, so it it is definitely like a multilayered challenge that involves the coordination of a variety of different actors and a variety of different level of governance to bring the skills to bring the resources that is needed for places to be able to link up and upgrade in global value chains. So definitely when thinking about GVC oriented policies, the problem of coordination and governance takes center stage and it is one that needs a careful design and significant also capacity building actions to make sure that different governance level are up to the task when interacting and dealing with global value chains that often involve like very big corporate players. And we cannot leave localities, we cannot leave local governments alone in dealing with these big players. So they need capacity and they need support. But that's very important not to see this as exclusively something that is in the real in the policy action range of

national governments. It's something that, crucially needs to involve subnational units of governance regions, but also see this very often.

And Oliver, I wanted to think about how far this strategy travels. It's easy for me to see it taking place in the EU or an OECD countries where we have relatively well developed central and local governments and we have infrastructure, human and and physical capital that might make this very apropos. My question is to what extent can we take this to places where both economic and political development might be less advanced, right? So what happens when we have either weaker central and regional or local governments? And to what extent should we think of this as being a strategy that's very useful for, you know, OECD or other parts of the West, but not necessarily so much for the global South?

Indeed, the evidence this points to, that this actually is almost, you know, more of a solution or at least an underutilized solution for lower income and lower developed countries. Often what is seen is we see these kind of, these difficulties, you know, these information asymmetries, these sort of this lack of engagement with the global value from the global value chain and the and the actors as part of that with the local level. And what we what we outlined in the book is some kind of public policy units that act as a sort of a go between the global value chain and the region or the locality in order to reduce this information distance and actually link up what the region can offer with what the kind of those actors in the global value chain want. And I think a key part of this in order to leverage that is what we describe as and others describe as global value chain mapping. You know understanding what are those local characteristics and the local capabilities? And also, the firms that are part of the region and how they can connect or build up to the value chain. I think that's important. And I think also this narrative of harnessing global value chains and the task based approach that we outlined, so looking beyond sectors by sectors and looking at actually activities is crucial for countries in the global South and regions in the global South because it allows a slightly different development pathway to the classic one of structural transformation that we often see. You know, it's often argued that, lower income countries go from agriculture to manufacturing to service. But what this approach allows you to do is to look at perhaps agriculture, perhaps, or primary sectors such as forestry and think, OK, what are the higher value added tasks within forestry that we can engage with rather than moving from forestry related tasks to services, for example. And indeed, you know you asked the extent to which it can be taken to some of these global South regions, much of actually the learning we took was from these regions we have a number of examples in in Sri Lanka, for example, and in the Philippines, where these local institutional actors have been able to link up with multi-nationals and have been able to integrate, for example, smaller secondary cities into these international production networks, attracting foreign direct investment and both connecting what they have within their city with what is needed from these global trade flows. And I just wanted to touch upon that as well because it's something I am, I missed out at the beginning with regards to their importance, you know, this isn't some sort of new fad or the next new exciting shiny development argument. You know, global value chains account for 50% of total trade today, so these, this is something that is not some new needs. This is something that all regions are exposed to and it's of whether you can engage with them beneficially is the kind of crucial question here, and those that have been engaging with them efficiently have seen increases in productivity, development and trade at a much faster rate than those that have not. And that's both at the higher income and the lower income level

And what allows that? In other words, your policy recommendations or the things that you think need to be done differently in some places and others in order to be able to harness these kind of potential benefits. So what do you think is missing and what are sort of prime examples of places that get it right?

I think this, as I indicated earlier, some aspects of global value chain mapping to understand where the region is on the chain and where it can kind of upgrade throughout the chain is quite important. We highlight global value chain orientated public policy, both looking at place based things that can happen that the locality can engage with itself, health but also place neutral. So as Ricardo spoke about the need for these different levels of government to engage in this the, you know, the place neutral things is not are not necessarily the ones that you're in charge of as a as a region or locality. These are the ones that occur at a national level but ultimately have spatially felt consequences, but they're not ways adhered to or thought through. So, I think when we're thinking about public policy having this, yeah, this kind of global value chain orientated lens is an important one. This can be both with more classic policies in hard infrastructure and soft infrastructure and thinking about standards and thinking about human capital and skills policy. All those things are often not viewed with the global value chains lens, so I think one of our arguments is to even just view those with the global value chains ends and you can see this benefit. But also there's more, there's policies that engage with the chain a little bit more and we speak to things like investment promotion agencies and local linkage units and how to kind of have aftercare with multinationals as, as also these policies that more actively engage with the chain that I think are important and often underutilized.

If I can add, sorry I think all the points that Oliver discussed and not the idea of doing things differently in terms of designing development strategies for localities, so putting, like the GVC lens on and trying to understand when designing a particular infrastructure, a project, how and to what extent this project has to do not only with internal connectivity or with connectivity in terms of OK, who am I exporting to? But also understanding what is my position in global value chains? And now also designing this particular port or this airport differently can facilitate my upgrading given like the sectors in which I already developed strength. How and to what extent I can facilitate the attraction of higher value added activities in the local economy? So that's about doing things differently, but it's also about doing new things. Doing new things means having a new role for localities when, for example, negotiating international trade deals with the understanding that the consequences of trade deals, the consequences of international negotiations, are again felt on the ground and can have very important implications for different localities depending on their participation into global value chains and their positions in global value chains, so it's about like having a new role for localities when we understand that they play a key role in the this global connectivity of which global value chains are the backbone, but also doing new things in terms of designing instruments, designing organizations that can facilitate what we call the vertical, the direct engagement with specific segment of the value chain, and that's where the idea of investment promotion agencies becomes central. Investment promotion agencies that you don't necessarily need to be like separate dedicated organizations, can also be dedicated unit within existing regional governments, but what is distinctive and what we find to work with our empirical research at the sub national level is having like giving these organizations this unit a very clear mandate in terms of which sections on the value chains to engage and giving them a specific role in building the local ecosystem. So what the, they

we have produced new evidence counterfactual like policy evidence to show that that investment promotion agencies at the sub national level can play a very important role. That is additional to the role of national investment promotional agencies that are already widely studied in the literature, and what role do they play? By being very close to the investor by being very close to the lead firm by being very close to where things happen on the ground, they can really act as plumbers of the local ecosystem, address specific bottlenecks that sometimes block the expansion of investment, the reliance on new domestic local suppliers, for example. So they really can play and we have shown that they can effectively play a role of creating the connections that are needed for the value chain to generate 8 persistent long lasting impacts on on the Aussie economy, so this is really like calls for national supranational and local level to rethink about what is needed to bring about economic development on the ground and we feel this gives a more like specific actionable message. These are the, what has been so far highlighted in the literature in giving general advice in terms of improving the quality of government generally, or the quality of institutions in the regions, this is like more easily said than done. Regions, in particular in emerging economies, I mean, if they knew how to do that, they would have done this already in the past and also how, how can we like achieve this in practice. We feel that by designing very specific organizations with a very clear mandate, mandated to engage with the global level. We can trigger a process of change that through demonstration effects and through interaction with the local ecosystem, can then be a very powerful starting point to create demand for institutional change to create demand at the local level for better well-functioning institutions, so we feel like the book also offers not the solution, but a possible new entry point, a possible trigger to generate much wider impacts on the local ecosystem at the subnational level, reinforcing and giving like a practical meaning and practical patients in a wider literature with which we of course agree that places like institutions at the very center of local development policies.

Thank you. I think that's excellent and it's a powerful statement about how to address this tension that we often have right about needing to promote good governance and better local government and all of the things in the kind of institutional qualities that we know are important. And at the same time recognizing that those are both important for economic growth, but also to some extent, dependent upon it, right? So this is a great, I think a really, really great intervention. I want to again thank both of you for joining us. If you have any last words, I'm happy to happy to hear them. But again, I think this is a really, really great contribution to how we think about local governance more generally, but also particularly economic development.

Thank you. Thanks for having us.

Yeah, thank you. Much appreciated.

Our next guest is Rebecca Grace Tan, who is a Lecturer at the National University of Singapore. Rebecca's research interests lie in issues surrounding Singapore politics, migration, citizenship,

multiculturalism and nationalism. She has done work on how the Singaporean state negotiate the two-faced challenge of embracing cultural pluralism in its population, while also forming a common national identity. Ellen and Rebecca met to discuss this work of hers, and will, among other things, talk about how the Singaporean state has approached the two-faced challenge of citizenship by developing a framework of multiracialism.

So I'm Rebecca, Rebecca Tan from the National University of Singapore. And I teach at the political science department.

Thank you, Rebecca, and thank you for joining us today. I'm excited about your work because first because I'm in Singapore, and it's a great introduction to coming here, but also because I think the questions and issues that you're raising with regards to Singaporean citizenship and national identity, and then how the state and volunteers tried to promote that, is extremely interesting and really, really fascinating ways to think about social norms and a lot of other issues that we tend to focus on at GLD. So I want to start by just asking you to describe a little bit what Singaporean national identity is like. What is the state and other Singaporeans trying to promote when they think about who we are?

So Singapore national identity is primarily driven around a couple of ideas. First is this idea of multiculturalism is, or the multicultural character. Singapore is a big part of dreaming what it is to be living in Singapore. The Singapore and lived experience, but also what it means to be Singapore. And so all my focus is on the idea of being part of the Singaporean multicultural. So the first is there's a lot of acceptance that Singapore ought to be diverse and it's a good thing. So where there might be other strategies that say you know you have to practice sort of of cultural, you need to be from a certain culture, speak a certain language. In Singapore, there's the expectation that it's OK if you are ethnically diverse. There are, of course, some expectations that you still conform to societies practices. So for example, speaking English is seen as something that unifies the amount of cultural character. So where there might be lots of languages spoken, and a lot of religions, you are expected to still speak English so that everybody can understand each other as sort of medium of communication. So there's there's that sort of understanding simple diversity. So on top of just being, it's OK to be diverse is also the expectation that you need to accept that diversity, too. So there's in some ways an expectation that there is a norm of accepting that diversity. Embracing it so this could be seen as sort of consuming alternative cultures in terms of the food that you eat, having known of other cultural practices. So there's a lot of this. For example, public education, but also even in the naturalization process, there are ways in which new citizens are exposed to alternative cultures. So for example, there are excursions are part of the citizenship process, is sort of an educational element where new citizens. And applicants for the forcing point citizenship abroad to various places of interest. This might be national sites, but also might be cultural sites so that be for example, you might visit Temple, or you might volunteer for example in your local neighborhood during Ramadan, which is a period of Muslim fasting, and you might volunteer, for example, to give out food for the needy people in your neighborhood when they've just broken their fast. And that's seen as a way of sort of multicultural education to kind of not just merely exposure, but sort of indicating or performing that you accept the multicultural nature of Singapore and if you aren't seen as as being so accepting of adopting that as of norm of accepting alternative cultures, then you often

seen as not a good Singaporean. So there's that sort of normal ethos of multiculturalism, but there are also other ideas as well of good neighborliness, civic mindedness, and of this language that even if you come from different backgrounds, you are still expected to be a good neighbour, so ideas, for example of being considered to other people for the change of behaviors in terms of being a little bit more living in public housing, for example, is a big part of Singaporean identity. So getting used to what it is to live in very close quarters with people, you know, to be responsible, to be welcoming to other people is a lot this idea. So there's a lot of as I think with a lot of citizenship practices, there's both sort of instruction, but there's also a lot of disciplining function to saying, you know, this is what's encouraged, and if you don't adhere to those expectations of what it is to be the good Singapore and the good citizen, then you will face some sort of stigma or certainly some sort of social censure if you don't adhere by whatever our sets of norms are, which I think has a lot to do with our multiculturalism, motivation, ISM, and accepting of those. But yes.

I just wanted to chime in here because one of the things that that really struck me right when I was reading your work, you talk about the CMIO, right, the Chinese, Malay, Indian and other kind of identities that Singapore is built around and that you say that the language of instruction in schools of English and the sort of language of public discourse is English. But that different groups essentially different ethnic groups will also learn their kind of mother tongue, right? So Chinese are learning Mandarin, Indians are learning the Hindi or Urdu at times. And so it's an interesting notion of trying to celebrate, not trying to make everybody the same, kind of melting pot idea of the states, but really trying to kind of celebrate that, that multiculturalism. And the other thing that jumped out and I think makes your point about the tolerance, is you talk about the Curry incident, right? And maybe you can say a little bit more about that, because I think it really brings to light this idea about the expectations around tolerance.

So in 2011, there was what's been labeled in sort of public discourse, is the Curry incident where a mainland Chinese family of migrants who moved in to public housing neighborhood had complained to their member of parliament about a neighbouring Indian family and the fact that they cooked curry. And basically was it was a, it was a sort of standard neighborly dispute that you might have, you know, in any neighborhood, right, about whether you put your shoes next to somebody in somebody's house next to somebody's house or, you know, your children making too much noise. In most societies, you just consider that to be a sort of standard neighborly dispute where you might ask someone to talk mediate. But this sort of came to the fore public's attention because of the fact that it was seen as very not accepting an alternative culture, and because it's huge public outcry and the mainland Chinese family were accused by online commentators of not being, you know, not accepting Singaporean culture, which was an interesting idea, that cooking Curry, or rather accepting that another family was going to engage in a different practice than what you're used to, was not seen as being part of Singaporean culture. And then the response as a sign of solidarity. Singaporeans organized Cook-a-curry Day and everybody that was supposed to, not everybody did, of course, was supposed to cook Curry in solidarity, so it was seen as a sort of insider outsider framing, in response to this mainland Chinese family. It was also, I mean, this all comes to inflections, obviously of xenophobia. I think when we when we can talk about Singapore as well, there's also a lot of challenges with when you talk about the CMIO structure, there is a tension within the CMIO structure of, you know for example, yes, we say Chinese, Malay, Indian and others. But when you try and classify groups in terms of saying you know you are Chinese within the group, there's a lot of diversity. There is diversity, obviously, of, for example, amongst the Chinese, you

have a diversity of language. For example, in Singapore, while the state does require that every person who's been labeled, this is a state labelling process, as Chinese is required to learn Mandarin as a language of second language in school in public schools. Traditionally people of ethnic Chinese background may not actually have spoken Mandarin because there's so many different dialects, and so there's a big discussion in Singapore obviously that alternative Chinese dialects, that are not Mandarin, effectively dying out. But also there's apart forms of some groups based upon, say, linguistic differences, so you see this for example, the Indian population of course, or the South Asian population. But you also have the challenge of insiders, so people who consider sort of native Singaporeans versus of naturalized citizens. So it's also the language of, you know, who was here first, there's a big distinction drawn between the local Chinese population and and newer citizens from from China, so they might use terms like, for example, PRCS. So even if they might be by their legal status, might have converges to Singaporean citizenship and be formally Singaporean citizens, they might still be treated as not sufficiently Singaporean following due to the reasons part of it is classes. Part of it is the fear of having mainland Chinese come in and take jobs and so forth. So there's also a sort of xenophobic people kind of differ on whether we have to label it xenophobia or not. But certainly that fear of migrants coming to Singapore, regardless of whether they change legal status, so it's designed to distance. So that's the challenge I think with the CMI framework that's being studied quite a bit. Sometimes the distinctions, the labeling of it, but also them being labeled with other people they don't think are the same as them. So that's I think the challenge, a governing structure that forces people into pigeonholes that they might not necessarily agree with.

And then tries to sort of say that's the, that's the definition of diversity right.

Exactly. So there's a very fixed idea of what it is to be Singaporean. It is the CMIO structure. If you don't fit within it, then there are lots of questions you know, are you truly Singaporeans or some of the people I interviewed, one of the interesting cases with somebody who who was white. She was British. She lived in Singapore for many years. She became Singapore citizen but she complained that basically she was never believed whenever she said, you know, I'm a Singaporean every looked at her and went, no, you can't be Singaporean because to be Singaporean is to look whatever it looks and so phenotypically Asian, right? I mean, as if there were really an Asian phenotype in in such a huge continent, but you have to look East Asian or you have to look South Asian. But if you look Caucasian, you can't be Singaporean, no matter how much you try and convince. And of course if you are mixed race, then there's a different element of that as well. So with creating the CMIO framework, people don't fit, particularly the CMI, the Chinese, Malay, Indian structure, it's it's not a meaningful category, obviously, even with its labeling, it was expected to be very, very elastic to kind of accommodate all people that don't fit within the criteria. But it's been used in a variety of ways represent nationalities, so sometimes others might be labeled as Japanese or boyanese or selenese, so they don't, they're not put under CMI, but in some ways they still accepted this, say the Indian population, so Sri Lankans, for example, sometimes labeled this or seen as part of the South Asian population of the Indian population, when of course they they aren't. So there's there's that difficulty I think of, any state trying to force people into particular ethnic groups for the purposes of of public policy things like housing policy or education policy.

So I wanna take us then to thinking about how there's, you're right, there's a muddiness, if you will, to what it is to be Singapore and at the same time the state is very much trying to promote a notion of the good Singaporean and what it means to fit within this. And you mentioned it before that there's a, these immigration and naturalization champions, these IMC's, who are volunteers effectively, although they are get some perks apparently from being volunteers, but they're volunteers who are kind of working hand in hand with the state as I understand it, to try to shape and mold good Singaporeans. Can you say a little bit more about the work that they're doing and the challenges they face?

So IMC's are called grassroots volunteers, they work with the state because they're basically volunteering under the purview of the state organization, because everything in Singapore very, very centralized. So under what we call people's associations, so their job is really to do a couple of things. The first is fairly formal, where they help to organize and facilitate part of naturalization process. So obviously part of this process occurs, so the immigration, the more governmental level, so things like the immigration checkpoint authority and you sending your paper and things, but a lot of the process of becoming a naturalized citizen is sort of more of an educational process, more community based process of, as I mentioned earlier, sort of there are few stages. This is called the Singaporean citizenship journey. So when you apply to become a citizen and you're sending your papers, you get provisional acceptance and that provisional that provisional acceptance, turning into sort of guaranteed, yet actually getting citizenship is dependent upon you doing what they call Singapore citizenship journey. And part of this very community based. So you have to for example go on excursions to sites, you also have to learn about your particular neighborhood, your constituency in Singapore, so you have to go and meet other new citizens and meet community leaders within your neighborhood. And so the integration naturalization champions do love that volunteer work, so they might, for example take new citizens out on excursions, they will introduce them to the neighbourhood through various events, but they also do other activities that are beyond the formal citizenship process that are more broadly about integrating the neighborhood, so they will do things like organize big cultural festivals. So for example, when you have Chinese New Year, which we had recently, but you also have other cultural festivals like Deepavali or Diwali, Araya for for the Muslim community, then they will have big cultural events that they will help organize. And so they might have things like, for example, dancers, they might have exhibitions educating all the neighbors. So it's not something that they're not focused merely upon new citizens, they're focused, obviously, on anybody who lives in the neighborhood so they might be non-citizens, they might be people who've grown up in in Singapore and are locally born citizenship by birth. So it's more of a broad educational idea of creating some integrated society through things like education and exposure. But of course they also a lot of these volunteers do more than just these formal roles. They take a lot of informal responsibility so that they create your pride, for example, in forming relationships through having done this for your work so they meet people, for example, they meet new citizens who they volunteer work, they often will do things like exchange phone numbers, invite them over to their house and so, and they might organize parties or get together and a more informal level which goes beyond what the state has set out and obviously beyond the purview of the state as well, because where the state kind of oversees how these volunteers communicate, for example ideas of citizenship or Singaporean nationalism, more than just citizenship through state-run processes, when you sort of form these informal relationships in the previous your home, then the state no longer is involved. And it doesn't necessarily mean they go against the state, but they sort of going above and beyond what's set out for them. It becomes a lot more of an informal process of integration and then hopefully the idea is that if you form relationships, at least in the eyes of some

of these volunteers, then you'll feel more rooted to the nation because you now have friends, you now have people that you can see yourself apart the community with. That's a big part of the integration process.

Which is right, very interesting because it's suggesting kind of the importance of a local attachment, right. And then, in some of the, make this point in in your work ,that it's one thing to go to the kind of a national site for this, another to become locally attached and the relationship between being locally attached and then feeling Singaporean right, which they really emphasize a lot. I found it very interesting that you talk about how because the citizenship process comes quite late and in some in some ways also quite class based, right, so you have to be generally a white collar worker, or you have to be in a certain visa class to begin with about 10 years before you can apply for citizenship. So some of the IMC themselves saying, this is far too late for us to be integrating people, right? Let's let's do it earlier. And while they might still focus on those who would ultimately be eligible or more likely to stay for a long period of time, they see this process and they kind of take it in their own hands to try to get people not to hang laundry on jungle gym or sort of like, you know, kids play around and and do the things that sort of make you, like you said, make you a good neighbor, right? And I thought that that was a very interesting role that they take o. And that it struck me that they may also be somewhat more legitimate in that role, because they're also the INC, right. So there's a way in which there's a feedback that they may be extending what the state had initially intended, but also their ability to do so, is it fair to say that it's partly because, or it might be partly because, they have this formal rule with the INC to begin with?

The way I've often seen role of INC's is it's a sort of shadow. The difference between, for example, them and itself state bureaucrat, or just an everyday citizen that's not involved in their state work, is that as a grassroots volunteer, they straddle this liminal position between both state and the local community. So they have, on one hand, they're communicating state ideas, but because they are volunteers, they're not tied for example, to the state paying their salaries. They're doing this because they, at least on paper, believe in the ideals. But they also see as part of giving that to the community, so they're doing for a range different purposes, and a lot of it is tied to their own sense of of being a citizen, they see as a citizenship duty as being themselves as volunteering itself being a form of being a good citizen and giving back, making Singapore kind of society that you would want to live in. In lots of societies, as a way of sort of thinking about shaping your own community, the way the into the community you'd like to live in. So they have that, but they also of course, have the authority of of of the state in some ways as being a community leader, right? So I would say, you know, I am a neighborhood there, the chairperson of My Neighbor Committee or I'm part of the INC, so I have access and knowledge to what the state policies are, I have a certain type of local community authority and so it it then changes the dynamic of course, because I can for example give you access to resources, I give you advice that maybe the everyday system that you might interact with in your neighborhood would not necessarily have access to. And so there, for example, were counts of of, you know you form friendships with new citizens, and new citizens for example might need help like for example access to public welfare systems or they, you know, they might want to get their kids into a local school and then because you say, you know, I have, I I am part of the local neighbor committee, some sort of grassroots level government structure, I can put you in touch with somebody else I know. And then sort of all those networks start forming. So there is that liminal position where they get more, they get more legitimacy because they are members of the community, right? I am also living in the same housing estate as you, so it's not the same sort of

elitist, or distant relationship you might have with a bureaucrat and kind of tells you this is what this is how you should live. And sort of government posters saying please do not litter. And you engage in these sorts of norms that sort of distant government messaging that people can often disregard or more like disregard. But then they still have the authority of being sort of part of the state. It's kind of, it's a, it's a very fluid process that they kind of straddle. They put on different hats, depending on what they're trying to negotiate.

Exactly, I was about that in some ways, what we can think of it as they have, they have various spaces of authority, right, that they're bringing to to the role and that and that then in some ways kind of in this case mutually reinforce each other. Yeah, that's...

Then there's also attention, of course, and sometimes they then find themselves, you know, if for example I think I think you mentioned earlier these cases where they disagree with government policy. So for example, they say you know a lot of why are we focusing, for example, our integration or naturalization processes on individuals who are gonna become naturalized citizens? Because the people who are gonna become nationalized citizens are really in that sense, lived in Singapore for a long time. The fact that they're becoming nationalized citizens, often as a sign already that they've...

That they're already integrated...

... want to become Singaporean. The concern or the I mean in virtual commercial problem areas, that need more integration, the communities that are more segregated from Singapore society are the ones that perhaps need the most integration, and yet government efforts are not as focused on that. Or we As for example INC's are not being told direct efforts towards for example the individuals, for example, who never get citizenship. So if you look at certain communities in Singapore, if you're, say on the work permit, the employment pass, so like domestic workers, construction workers day and effectively, will never be able to access citizenship. And yet in some ways they are often segregated, in large part from Singaporean society, and so some of the INCs say, look, they need to be integrated. They're the perhaps the most segregated, but our government funding our directive from the state says that we should not be focusing on this group. We should be focusing on people who are going to become citizens, who are very indicated that they can. And obviously are able to even apply in the first place. So they they see that they, they, disagree with state policy. It's interesting that they kind of are torn because they see it as, you know, the government policy is not really doing it enough. So sometimes they will go above and beyond, but this will obviously depend on things like resources, how much they can do that. So some of them would say, you know, I see this as an extension of my duty, so I would do beyond. You know make friends with people who will never, I would not otherwise be able to reach in the sort of official capacity, but I still see it as carrying on the same role, just not for the purposes of citizenship, because natural integration is something that should occur regardless of whether you're gonna get citizenship or not. Sort of reshaping policy. It's not a huge process, but it certainly is occurring obviously on a one-on-one basis.

And in some ways again, it shows the importance of their living locally, right, that what they really want to do is improve the local experience and this is how they can do it. Thank you again. This is fascinating work. Really, really interesting and I learned a lot in reading it. It also really sparks a lot of ideas about how we think about the roles of citizens, but also the attempts at shaping them, so thank you so much for joining.

Thanks for having me.

Joining us now is Nick Kuipers, who is an assistant professor of political science at the National University of Singapore. Together with Nick, we'll delve into the topic of civil service exams and their impact on representation in municipalities, as well as individuals' attitudes towards them.

Nick has conducted a study on applicants to the Indonesian civil service to understand how high-stakes exams affect their political attitudes - comparing the attitudes of applicants who just barely passed the exam with those who just barely failed.

The findings show that high-stakes exams create a competitive environment, where privileged individuals with better access to resources and education tend to excel, widening the representation gap between privileged and underprivileged groups. Furthermore, those who pass and were offered a job in the civil service, reported higher satisfaction with the process, more positive feelings towards other groups, and stronger identification with the nation. While those who failed reported the opposite.

Keep listening to hear Nick talk about how these findings can have unintended consequences for social cohesion.

My name is Nick Kuipers, and I'm an assistant professor of political science at the National University of Singapore.

Thank you for joining us today, we're going to talk about civil service exams and their impact on representation in municipalities, as well as thinking about how they influence, or might influence individuals' attitudes towards them. So let's start just by laying out what a civil service exam is!

Great, so civil service exams were historically introduced for the first time in the UK in the mid 19th century, and they were seen as an improvement over previous systems of bureaucratic selection, in which civil servants were selected through, say, patronage or aristocratic mechanisms. And the idea is that they would improve the quality of civil servants by gauging applicants' preparedness on a host of different criteria. Right. And so, these civil service exams contain questions, gauging applicants' preparedness. For the specific tasks to the job to which they're applying, but also in terms of, say,

general knowledge, oftentimes civil service exams will contain arithmetic questions, logic questions so on and so forth.

And then the consequences of you said that is partly to increase or improve the quality of civil servants in the bureaucracy. But there was also, expectations that it would have broader consequences in terms of representation of different groups within society in the bureaucracy.

So these exams are designed to screen candidates on preparedness for these jobs. But these jobs are highly desirable. They are often tenured for life and they pay very well. And so they're quite high stakes. And so people spend a lot of time preparing for them, and in lots of countries, you see expensive tutoring services that crop up, in which people take time off work to prepare for these exams. And so one of the consequences of this arrangement is that individuals who come from a priori privileged groups tend to have greater access to resources to pay for these preparatory services. As well as historically, having better access to, say, early childhood education that makes them better positioned to do well on these exams. And so at the margins, what you see is that the introduction of civil service exams is thought to sort of improve the representation of privilege groups to the detriment of underprivileged groups.

And so you look at this with regards to kind of the progressive US, right, and you're finding a little bit different in terms of the the impact of these exams on representation and you link it to city size, right? So I think that's particularly interesting for people interested in kind of local governance and thinking about what size of cities might, can you say a little bit more about that?

And so the the sort of standard narrative about the sort of Progressive Era reform movement when it comes to civil service reform is that the impetus for these reforms was that a recent wave of immigrants and cities in the US had through patronage, developed a sort of stranglehold on local. And white Anglo-Saxon Protestants, who are typically wealthier, we're seeing their share and representation in public administration decline, and so the standard narrative is that these Wasps used civil service exams and these reforms under the sort of banner of good governance, to try and dislodge immigrants from power. And so in. This paper with my co-author Alexander Sahn, we look at how representation for recent immigrants changed following these reforms. And instead of looking at a few cities, New York, Chicago, Cleveland, we look at the full sample of U.S. cities and what we find is that on average, following these reforms, in fact. Representation for recent immigrants, particularly white immigrants, actually improved following these reforms. And one of the things we do in trying to explore why our sort of surprising results obtain is to look at the effect size based on the different sizes of cities, right? And what we find is that in the largest cities, consistent with the standard narrative, you see that there is in fact a decline in representation for recent immigrants. But in a much larger number of cities that include small cities, so Toledo, OH, I can't think of any other. Cities because they're. You actually see the representation of recent immigrants actually improve following the introduction of civil service exams.

And that was particularly for Irish Americans, if I remember.

So we find an average positive effect for all recent white immigrants, but the effect is concentrated among Irish Americans, which we think is actually particularly surprising. Given that there's this sort of large history around, you know, Irish need not apply for these jobs and there's this view that Irish were discriminated against and and. Perhaps that's true. But what we're finding is that the meritocratic sort of recruiting of civil servants, perhaps. Pushed away those those those barriers to entry.

And in this case right, I mean the advantage that the Irish Americans had, or the Irish immigrants had was that they were that English had been their language. They tended to be more literate, so in that sense it's still within the notion of kind of the more privileged if, if, as I was reading it right, so among the immigrants, those who are able to succeed are the ones who had a kind of a leg up right? They weren't the Germans who came in and were trying to learn English. So they had, they had advantage among the immigrant population. Is that a fair way to think of it?

Yeah, I guess. You know, I think it is, I don't think we've thought about it in those terms, right as possessing English literacy as a as an advantage, but it certainly is, right. And I think that's the primary mechanism that we propose, through which the Irish were able to do better than, say, the Germans or the Polish or the Russians, right?

Right. The other groups that are out there.

No, that's a good interpretation.

But I think that again, you know, you go back to thinking too a little bit in the paper about the capture that pre Progressive Era reform capture that different groups had, right? And that the idea is that these minority groups and these immigrants had capture in the large cities, but they didn't have capture in the in the smaller towns and and I think that's a key. Element of your argument right that that is partly about who is getting dislodged and that is. Partly about you. Know what is the capacity of those? Who are, you know, potentially dislodging.

That's right. So I. Think we and and this is perhaps more speculative than other. Aspects of the paper. But I think our preferred interpretation of the results is to place these findings in historical perspective, right, and to say, well, in New York City and Chicago.

There were large.

Populations of recent immigrants and they were able to forge these coalitions that could capture local public administration. Because 40, 50, 60% of the vote shares enough to swing an election. But fewer immigrants settled in places like Manchester, NH or Toledo. OH, for instance. And in these places, recent immigrants weren't able to forge these dominant coalitions, right? And in those places under patronage, they were in fact discriminated against. Rather than using the sort of capture that you saw in New York City or Chicago to get access to government jobs. And so when civil service

reform reached these smaller cities. We argue that. It sort of removed these barriers to entry, right, and they were able to to access government jobs more effectively.

And you obviously don't look at the individual impacts of the impacts of of these reforms on individuals attitudes in the Progressive Era, because these people aren't around to be asking what they what they think, but you do when you're looking at a paper on Indonesia. Where you think about what's the what's the effect of having taken the exam and either succeeded or failed on your attitude towards the state? Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

So this paper takes as its premise, what I reject in the previous paper, right, which is that civil service exams create an unequal distribution of who gets a government job right, and this idea that minorities are going to say, lose out on government jobs under civil service exams. And one of the things that I hypothesized in this other paper in Indonesia is that against that backdrop, the experience of failing a civil service exam might motivate attitudinal changes on on, say, political resentment with a civil service exam, you're being evaluated and judged to possess insufficient merit, and if you know that our groups are disproportionately successful, it might be that the experience of failure is than making you more resentful, right? And so partnering with the Indonesian Civil Service Agency, we conducted a survey of all 3.6 million applicants to the Indonesian Civil Service in 2019 and then. Followed up with a questionnaire asking them a range of questions, including regarding national solidarity, political resentment, outgroup resentment and so on. And then I'm able to sort of compare these attitudes across winners and losers. And what I find is that individuals who failed the civil service exam are, in fact, more resentful about. Groups and they report lower levels of national identification. And so this I think depending on your perspective is perhaps a normatively concerning result.

One of the questions I had for you again trying to put that first paper together with the 2nd and thinking about who is advantage or disadvantaged at the time of the of the exam, right? And in a sense of how identifiable might? They be because if it's. The case that you have clearly identified groups that are less likely to succeed. Then you can see how this mechanism of resentment, particularly if you're part of those groups, can be increased, which is a different kind of situation than if it's much more difficult to identify distinctions between the groups who are succeeding and and failing.

Yeah, that's right. And one of the things that's unique about the Indonesian. Method of civil service exams is that it makes the process of identifying whose failing and who's succeeding very very clear, and so the contextual background is that. This civil service exam is computerized in Indonesia and it was rolled out in 2018. Prior to that, there was widespread and sort of. Clientelism and patronage in the distribution of government. Jobs and they rolled out this system of computerized civil service exams, and it's been quite effective. But people still complained of they didn't know if the scores were being manipulated after the fact. And so the solution that they rolled out in many provinces, although not everywhere. Is to basically have. A scoreboard of individuals names and as they're answering these questions on the. Computer the scoreboard is updating their scores and you can see their relative rankings. Right. And so if you look at these names, you can of course infer ethnicity, religion and so on and so forth, right? You can see who's succeeding and who's failing based on this scoreboard, right? So it's quite gladiatorial and public.

Exactly. It's remarkable, isn't it?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. But.

It's it's really been I think, quite effective in rooting out foul play. But you have to ask yourself, you know, at. What cost is it coming right cause the?

OK.

The sort of humiliation of failures. Perhaps multiplying because it's so?

So just thinking for a moment about what are the implications for people who are interested in more meritocratic, you know, government and bureaucracies or interested in implementing these kinds of of exams. Can you share a little bit of your thoughts on what this means from a policy?

Yeah, it's a great question. And and it's one I you know I've thought about before and I don't have a great answer to, you know, I think one of the findings that has been confirmed over and over again is that. When civil servants are recruited meritocratically, you get better measures of service delivery and I think that's unambiguously true, right at least as compared to, say, recruitment under patronage. Now I think at the same time, it's important to recognize that there are these downsides, right? It's not a normative absolute and I think. Governments and civil service agencies could do more to, say, manage. The resentment that comes from meritocratic selection that identify an Indonesia paper, and so one of the things that I think is an engine of the findings is that. Individuals will apply to jobs and regions where they believe themselves to be more competitive for a job. And this, I think, motivates a lot of resentment because people say, oh, I failed, but I failed because some outsiders. Got my job. And so I think you could imagine sort of minor policy tweaks regarding, say, residency requirements. You have to have resided in this district for at least five years before. Applying to a job in this place. And I think this could go some way towards managing this level of resentment that at scale could be really threatening social cohesion, right? So in Indonesia, there are stories of aggrieved civil servants burning down local branches of the Civil Service agency, right? It does lead to genuine conflict. And so I think managing that. With these, perhaps. Light touch policy interventions could could go some way.

Is it also feasible to think about policies that might help to level the playing field? I mean, in some ways, by the time a person is young adults or adult and and applying for these jobs, it might be a little bit late. But start out by saying, OK, there's times when people take time off from work to be able to study and prepare. Are there ways? In which those who are interested in implementing these reforms could also provide a more equal opportunity to take that time off or to be able to have tutorials or to have other sets of support. Right.

Starting from a young age, of course there should be I. Think more equal? Access to education and high quality education across different groups. I haven't seen any examples in any context of, say, governments offering vouchers for aspirants to civil service to take on 80 hours of tutoring services or whatever. And even if you offered the voucher. Then the question becomes well, do they have the time to take off from work and some rich kid from Jakarta can take off time because he can afford it and he's got the savings.

Can everybody equally access it?

But a poor kid out in, say, Maluku and the eastern region of Indonesia, you know, he has to be working all day to to make ends. Meet. So we probably can't take off 8080 hours. And so I think, you know the actual nitty gritty of that policy implementation would be quite difficult and and I think. One solution that you've seen across the world that I don't address in any of my work, which I think is contentious but quite interesting is, is forms of affirmative action. Do you offer an after the fact point bonus to individuals from marginalized groups?

Do you create quotas and what are the implications of these policies in terms of? Quality of service. Delivery in terms of the resentment that I identify in in and you should paper, I mean these are still open questions that I'd like to. Answer in future work excellent.

Yeah, and 1st. Of all, congratulations. You do wonderful work. Exciting and I think. It's it's important because it not only addresses and turns our attention to things like. Civil service exams and and kind of meritocratic bureaucratic assignment, but it also really gets at these deeper questions about inequalities, attempts to address them. And then what might? Be perverse effects in some context, right? And really getting us to think through those well.

No, thank you.

Thank you so much.