

Introducing Hans Lueders

Hoover Fellow, Hoover Institution, Stanford University

Hans' research examines the political and social consequences of migration in the United States and Western Europe. His current projects explore how domestic migration reshape electoral politics and civic engagement in wealthy democracies, internal mobility's ties to key challenges facing democratic societies, political polarization, democratic discontent, and declining local-level participation. He also studies authoritarianism, using detailed archival data from Communist East Germany to analyze how dictatorships manage their citizens and how individuals can influence policymaking even in the absence of democratic channels.



Your work connects domestic migration to political outcomes in very different contexts—from Southern Africa to rich democracies like Germany and the United States. What motivated you to explore migration not just as a demographic phenomenon but as a political force that reshapes civic life and representation across these varied settings?

Migration has been a key driver of change throughout human history. Existing scholarship on migration in the social sciences usually focuses on international migration. This focus makes sense in light of the significant consequences that international migration has on economic progress, societal conflict, and political change. However, it is incomplete: far more (roughly three times as many!) people move within their countries than enter them from abroad. My research is motivated by this lack of scholarly attention to domestic migration, as well as by the realization that domestic migration has the potential to create at least as much change as international migration.

My interest in domestic migration also has a personal component: having lived in three different countries and a dozen cities in my life, I felt compelled to research how such migration shapes politics, both at the individual level and across communities.

As a co-author on the current GLD book project, *Boundaries and Barriers*, you, Ellen Lust, and Erica Ann Metheny are examining how social institutions moderate migrants' integration in Malawi and Zambia. How do your findings refine existing accounts of social institutions and informal governance, and what do they suggest about the mechanisms through which local communities include or exclude newcomers politically?

Our book project introduces much-needed complexity and nuance into our understanding of domestic migration, social institutions, and informal governance in the contexts we study. We show that the experiences of domestic migrants differ widely – and systematically – across local communities.

Social institutions influence who is allowed to move to a particular community, as well as whether and how differences between newcomers and long-term residents matter for social integration, political participation, and access to welfare; some social institutions reduce differences in these outcomes, while others amplify them.

As such, we revise the common assumption that internal mobility is relatively free and unrestricted. In fact, social institutions in some communities are so powerful they generate experiences for domestic migrants that are not unlike those of international migrants. Our finding that newcomers face very different realities across communities allows us to make a broader point: a one-size-fits-all lens is insufficient to understand domestic migration.

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Several of your projects examine political participation, representation, and institutional incentives outside the context of migration, including work on political mobilization and democratic responsiveness. How does this strand of your research inform broader debates about how citizens engage with political institutions, and how does it complement your work on migration and geographic change?

My research seeks to understand who participates in politics and why, and what this means for democratic governance and stability. Much of this work calls on scholars to revise and broaden our existing understanding of politics.

For example, as part of my work on government responsiveness to citizen demands in autocratic regimes, I undertook a study in the former German Democratic Republic (1). Here, I identified a surprising amount of responsiveness driven by electoral incentives, which is at odds with the idea of an unresponsive dictatorship (2).

In turn, my work on domestic migration in Germany and the United States shows that domestic migration creates a powerful spatial divide between in- and out-migration areas (3). This is unrelated to our usual understanding of political behavior, which centers on rural-urban divides in partisanship. It emphasizes the importance of local orientations, which is at odds with political science's usual focus on national politics (4).

Bibliography

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