

Uma M. Ilavarasan

CGIS Knafel, 1737 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, MA 02138

umailava.com · uilavarasan@g.harvard.edu

EDUCATION

Harvard University

Malcolm Wiener Ph.D. Research Fellow in Poverty and Justice

Ph.D., Political Science

Expected May 2027

Dissertation: “Policy by Contract: How and Why Advanced Industrial Democracies Wield their Purchasing Power to Govern” (book-length dissertation)

Committee: Alisha Holland (chair), Daniel Carpenter, Stephanie Ternullo, Torben Iversen

A.M., Political Science

May 2023

Reed College

B.A., Economics

May 2019

Phi Beta Kappa, Gerald M. Meier Award for Distinction in Economics

RESEARCH

Working Papers

1. “Policy by Contract.”
2. “The Microfoundations of Power-Sharing: Citizen Support for and Opposition to Political Sectarianism in Lebanon” with Melani Cammett, Aytuğ Şaşmaz, and Sami Atallah. (*Under review*)

Book Chapters

1. “‘In Every Contract We Must Have Some Sort of Standard to Purchase By’: Setting Technical Policy by Contract at NIST” forthcoming in *The Contracting State*, Alisha Holland and Gautam Nair (eds.).

Selected Work in Progress

1. “Victims of their Own Success: Why the Most Effective Harm Reduction Policies are Uniquely Vulnerable to Retrenchment” with Aidan Connaughton and Julius Wilson.
2. “Show Me the Money! Discretionary Grant Receipt as a Measure of Local Bureaucratic Capacity” with Aidan Connaughton.
3. “Eight Hours for Public Work: Government Contracts and the Emergence of Labor Regulations in the United States.”
4. “The Physics of State-Building: Professional Science as a Catalyst for Bureaucratic Development in the United States, United Kingdom, and Germany.”

GRANTS, FELLOWSHIPS & RESEARCH AWARDS

Weatherhead Research Cluster on Business and Government Research Grant (\$3,000)	2025
Weatherhead Graduate Student Associate Research Grant (\$1,370, \$3,000)	2024, 2025
Weatherhead Dissertation Writing Grant (\$21,025)	2025
Institute for Quantitative Social Science Research Grant (\$3,000)	2024
Center for American Political Studies Seed Grant (\$1,000)	2024
Malcolm Hewitt Wiener Research Fellowship (\$12,000)	2020

Harvard University Presidential Scholarship (\$32,000)	2019
Reed College Economics Summer Research Program Student Fellowship (\$4,500)	2017, 2018

TEACHING & ADVISING EXPERIENCE

Awards & Certificates

Derek Bok Center Teaching Certificate	2025
Cheryl B. Welch Thesis Adviser Award	2025
Certificate of Distinction in Teaching	Various
Received every eligible semester.	

Courses Taught

For all listed courses, I served as a teaching fellow.

Undergraduate

Law & Inequality	Spring 2023, Spring 2024
Authoritarianism	Fall 2023
Introduction to Probability and Statistics	Spring 2018

Graduate

Quantitative Social Science Methods I	Fall 2022
---------------------------------------	-----------

Advising Roles

All advising conducted within the Harvard Department of Government.

Honors Thesis Adviser (7x)	2024–
Danny Laughary '25 and Hana O'Looney-Goto '26 received James Gordon Bennett Prizes.	
Concentration Adviser	2024-2026

SELECTED PRESENTATIONS & CONFERENCE ACTIVITY

Presenter

American Political Science Association	2024, 2025, 2026
Annual Conference of the Consortium on the American Political Economy	2026
The Contracting State: How and Why Governments Rely on Private Contractors	2024
Annual Conference of the Society for Political Methodology	2024

Organizer

Harvard Experimental Political Science Conference	2021
---	------

SERVICE

Co-Coordinator, American Politics Speaker Series	2023-2026
Coordinator, GETTING-Plurality Research Workshop	2023-2024
Executive Board, Harvard Government Graduate Student Association	2020-2021
Co-Coordinator, Harvard Experiments Working Group	2020-2021
Data Fellow, Harvard University Department of Government	2019-2020
Departmental Representative, Harvard Graduate Student Council	2019-2020

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Gary King, Harvard Department of Government	2022-2025
Fotini Christia, MIT Department of Political Science	2020–2021
Jon Rork, Reed College Department of Economics	Summer 2018
Kimberly Clausing, Reed College Department of Economics	Summer 2017

OTHER PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Consultant, American Civil Liberties Union	2023-2025
Financial Economist, U.S. Department of the Treasury	2021-2022
Assistant Political Researcher, DHM Research	2016

OTHER SKILLS & AFFILIATIONS

Affiliations and Memberships

Weatherhead Graduate Student Associates Program; Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies; Institute for Quantitative Social Science; Center for American Political Studies; American Political Science Association; Midwest Political Science Association; Allen Lab for Democracy Renovation (2023-2024); GETTING-Plurality Research Network (2023-2024); MIT Global Diversity Lab (2020-2021)

Languages

French (*limited working proficiency*)

Software

L^AT_EX, R

REFERENCES

Alisha Holland

Professor of Government
Harvard University
+1 617-495-1899
aholland@fas.harvard.edu

Daniel Carpenter

Allie S. Freed Professor of Government
Harvard University
+1 617-495-8280
dcarpenter@gov.harvard.edu

Stephanie Ternullo

Assistant Professor of Government
Harvard University
+1 617-495-2097
sternullo@fas.harvard.edu

Torben Iversen

Harold Hinchings Burbank Professor of Political Economy
Harvard University
+1 617-384-5847
iversen@fas.harvard.edu