My research focuses on the development and application of new methods to bridge the classic divide between law and economics—the consequentialist view that optimal policy should be based on calculations of costs and benefits—and the non-consequentialist view that policy should be determined deontologically: from duties we derive what is the correct law—what is right and just. I work on topics in political economy, behavioral economics, and development. This work has generated over 5,700 citations in Google Scholar as of January 1, 2023.

My primary work in law and political economy develops and applies methods for measuring the consequences of judicial precedents. My co-authors and I develop methods for causal inference with high-dimensional instrumental variables, such as the characteristics of judges on randomly composed panels (Belloni, Chen, Chernozhukov, and Hansen 2012, ECMA). We have applied these methods to examine the impact of judicial precedents on normative values and economic outcomes. We show that precedents forbidding sexual harassment increase female labor force participation (Chen and Sethi, Management Science R|R), government takings power increase growth and inequality (Chen and Yeh, WP), progressive free speech standards liberalized sexual attitudes and behaviors and increased crime rates and sexually transmitted diseases (Chen and Yeh, Economic Journal R&R), and pro-abortion precedent reduced restrictive state regulations on abortion access and led to resistance and subsequent acceptance in abortion attitudes (Chen, Levonyan, and Yeh, AEJ: Policy R|R). We discuss the problems of reverse causality when distinguishing norms and law (Chen and Yeh 2013, William & Mary Bill of Rights Journal) and validate the assumptions of our method for causal inference by documenting district judge compliance to appellate rulings (Chen 2022, IRLE) and measuring the stock market responsiveness to judge assignment on the case completion date (Araiza, Chen, and Yeh 2013, Empirical Legal Analysis) and the non-responsiveness of stock markets to the date of judge assignment (Badawi and Chen 2017, ALER). My co-authors and I propose using predictions of judicial decisions for measuring their consequences (Chen, Huang, Zhang, and Wang 2019, NeurIPS; Frontiers in Law; Chen, Chen, and Lewis 2020 NeurIPS). Using this method, e.g., the text of judges’ past writings to predict their current decisions, we show that environmental jurisprudence precipitate short-term reductions in water pollution in India (Bhupatiraju, et al., WP). In building this methodology, we characterize judicial sentiment (Ash, Chen, and Galletta 2022, Economica) in vector space (Ash and Chen 2019, Law as Data; Bhupatiraju, Chen, and Venkataramanan, Science Advances R|R) and document political, consequentialist motivations among judges (Chen and Reinhart, JLC R|R; Chen and Lu, WP). Other work proposes automated classification of policy levers (Delgado, Fierro, Lin, and Chen,
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WP) and modes of reasoning (Ash, Chen, Mainali, Meier 2018, Computational Legal Studies) to automate the tool for consequentialist judicial decision-makers.

My secondary work in law and political economy examines the interplay of markets and morality and the impact of incarceration on public health. In one study, my co-authors and I found that a corporate-sponsored economics program for judges, which trained 40% of U.S. federal judges by 1990, led to a 10% change in outcomes of their economics cases and a 20% increase in sentencing severity when judges had discretion in sentencing (Ash, Chen, and Naidu, QJE R|R). We also discovered that economics language increased among judges due to peer exposure in random panel compositions (Chen and Reinhart, WP), identified persuasive memes that predicted agreement among judges in panels (Chen, Parthasarathy, and Verma 2017, ICAIL), and found that economics-trained judges were harsher towards minorities in sentencing (Chen and Reinhart, WP). Our research suggests that law and economics may have resulted in a paradigm shift (Chen, WP). In other studies, my co-authors and I have explored how market forces shape political beliefs (Chen and Lind 2007, J Ecumenical Studies, WP) and the production of justice (Chen, He, and Yamashita, WP). We have also looked at the relationship between markets and justice (Chen and Abrams 2013, U Penn J Business Law), whether markets can stimulate rights (Chen 2015, RAND), the influence of markets on moral values (Chen 2022, JLEO), and whether markets overcome repugnance (Chen, EER R&R). Additionally, we found that disclosure of pharmaceutical company payments to doctors can have different effects depending on the size of the payment and the strength of disclosure laws (Chen, Levonyan, Reinhart, and Taksler 2019, JLS) and are currently studying the impact of these payments on prescribing patterns and patient outcomes (Chen, Reinhart, and Sun). My co-authors and I have also coined the term "carceral-community epidemiology" and found that jail cycling is associated with the spread of Covid-19 (Reinhart and Chen 2020, Health Affairs) and with Covid-19 disparities in Cook County (Reinhart and Chen 2021, PNAS) and nationally (Reinhart and Chen 2021, JAMA Network Open).

My primary work in law and behavioral economics studies bias in judicial decisions. I present a definition of justice using the rubric of machine learning (Chen 2019, AIL) and a framework where measuring behavioral anomalies documents revealed preference indifference (Chen 2019, Law as Data). My co-authors and I show that weather and time of day affects decisions (Chen and Eagel 2017, ICAIL), as does the defendant’s name (Chen, Hajdini, and Reinhart, WP), defendant’s birthday (Chen and Philippe, JEBO R&R), NFL football (Chen and Loecher, WP), snap judgments (Dunn, Sagun, Sirin, and Chen 2017, ICAIL), elections and wartime (Berdejo and Chen 2017, JLE), priming (Chen, WP), gambler’s fallacy (Chen,
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Moskowitz, and Shue 2016, QJE), sequences (Plonsky, et al. 2022, JAP), motivational reasoning (Chen and Lu, WP), perceived masculinity (Chen, Halberstam, and Yu 2016, Plos-ONE; Chen, Halberstam, Kumar, and Yu 2019, Law as Data; Chen, Halberstam, and Yu WP), voice mimicry (Chen and Yu, WP), religious rituals (Mehmood, Seror, and Chen 2023, NHB), shared biographical characteristics (Cui, Shang, Zheng, and Chen 2016, NeurIPS), shared ethnicity (Chen, Graham, Ramos-Maqueda, and Singh, WP), and their own gender attitudes expressed in text, which also affects the gender of judges they cite, reverse, and assign authorship to (Ash, Chen, and Ornaghi 2022, AEJ: Applied). I show that judges less attentive to surprise reversals have implicit risk rankings of litigants closer to random and display difference-in-indifference to litigants from the Global South (Chen, WP). Difference-in-indifference helps explain prosecutor decisions in screening (Chen 2017, NeurIPS), where the interaction of hierarchy and race contribute to racial disparities (Chen and Reinhart, WP). Behavioral anomalies can be used to assess judicial nominees and predict their decisions on the Supreme Court (Ash and Chen 2018, Cardozo Law Review).

My secondary work in law and behavioral economics focuses on building and applying tools to measure principles of fairness and justice in decisions (Chen, Schonger, and Wickens 2016, JBEF) and stated attitudes (Basetti, et al. 2021, NeurIPS; 2023, AI Magazine). My co-authors and I provide a formal interpretation of deontological motivations and a revealed preference method to distinguish the presence of deontological motives from purely consequentialist ones (Chen and Schonger 2021, Science Advances). We use this framework to identify problems with commonly used methods in experimental economics (Chen and Schonger, JESA R&R), explain non-confrontational extremists in the judiciary (Chen, Michaeli, and Spiro, EER R&R), and identify preference falsification among laypeople (Chen, Mehmood, Naseer, and Seror, WP). We formalize when different survey methods, like Likert or Quadratic Voting for Survey Research, are superior (Cavaille, Chen, and Van der Straeten 2019, University of Chicago Law Review), test these methods in a nationwide randomized control trial measuring polarization (Cavaille, Chen, and Van der Straeten, WP), and show how machine learning methods can select among survey methods (Cavaille, Chen, Das, and Van der Straeten, WP). Other work experimentally weakens the case for ambiguity aversion (Chen and Schonger, JBEE R&R) and assumptions underlying models for ambiguity aversion (Chen and Schonger, Theory and Decision R&R). In applied contexts, my co-authors and I document the malleability of moral views to laws (Chen and Yeh 2014, JEBO) and rule compliance without formal institutions (Mehmood and Chen, WP). We also document the behavioral response to legitimacy of acts taken by others (Chen and Horton 2015, INFORMS), legitimacy of rules (Shaw, Horton, and
Chen 2011, ACMCSCW), and perceived demand for legitimacy of rules (Chen, Michaeli, and Spiro, WP). In a historical context, I find limited deterrent effects of the death penalty by the British military during World War I and show that executions spurred Irish desertions (Chen, WP). In a more recent context, my co-authors and I investigate the long-term impacts of criminal justice severity on perceived legitimacy of the State (Chen, Philippe, and Reinhart). Among children, my co-authors and I field a nationwide platform for collecting social preferences of secondary students (Terrier, Chen, and Sutter 2021, PNAS), show how these metrics can predict Covid-19 resilience (Chen, et al., PLoS-ONE R&R), and measure the spread of social preferences in networks (Bhargava, Chen, Sutter, and Terrier, WP). Another stream of work characterizes the role of empathy and emotions in a formal model of recognition-respect: recognizing when our decisions violate others’ reference points (Chen 2018, REE). My co-authors and I examine the strategic display of emotions (Chen, Hopfensitz, Van Der Ven, Van Leeuwen, Leadership Quarterly R&R), how empathy affects fairness considerations (Chen 2018, RLE), and how agency makes decisions fairer (Chen 2019, Advances in Economics of Religion). Ongoing work leverages the behavioral insights to propose fairer ways to incorporate AI in decision-making (Babic, Chen, Evgeniou, and Fayard 2020, HBR), generate buy-in from judges to reduce behavioral anomalies (Chen 2022, AJLE), and assess machine learning for judicial decision-making (Chen and Sigstad, WP).

My primary work in law and development collaborates with judiciaries to improve justice using administrative data, machine learning, and randomized control trials. My co-authors and I summarize the literature on law and economic development (Ramos-Maqueda and Chen, WP). We examine the potential for digital platforms to enhance access, efficiency, and fairness of justice and reduce market-level constraints to economic development (Bhupatiraju, Chen, and Joshi 2021, National Law School of India Review; Handbook of Measurement; Chen and Ramos-Maqueda 2022, MENA World Bank Flagship Report). Through a randomized judicial reform in Kenya, we have demonstrated that information and accountability can be used to reduce court backlogs by 20% and increase formal sector employment and wages (Chemin, et. al, WP), consistent with correlational evidence on court speed and informality (Chen, Lee, and Neis, WP). In India, we show that free legal search can reduce case backlogs, increase access to justice, and have positive impacts on firm assets (Bhupatiraju, et. al, WP). We have also made India's e-courts data available for analysis (Ash, et. al, WP), such as representation in terms of religion and caste in the justice system (Bhupatiraju, Chen, Joshi, Neis, Cambridge Elements R&R). In Chile, in a randomized trial, we found that reducing information barriers about court performance can increase case clearance by one standard deviation (Carillo, Chen, Ramos-
Maqueda, and Silveira, WP). In addition, we document the positive impact of e-justice platforms in access to justice for small firms (Chen, Ramos-Maqueda, Sigstad, and Silviera, WP), the positive economic impacts of court construction (Chemin, Chen, and Ramos-Maqueda, WP), and the negative effects of static judicial productivity quotas on justice (Ramos-Maqueda and Chen, WP). Information and access are only part of rule of law as renewed attention on disparities in the justice system has highlighted as has a focus on the pro-sociality of civil servants for state capacity. In Pakistan, we have conducted a series of randomized trials with civil servants, showing that we can effectively train them in altruism (Mehmood, Naseer, and Chen, JDE R&R), econometrics (Mehmood, Naseer, and Chen, WP), and AI (Mehmood, Naseer, and Chen, WP), and influence their decisions in both lab and field settings. In Peru, we have found that the Socratic method can improve judges' grades and curiosity (Chen, Ramos-Maqueda, and Silveira, WP), and that providing feedback to instructors can reduce judges’ reversal rates and implicit bias (Chen, Ramos-Maqueda, and Silveira, WP). In ongoing work, we are testing the use of smart mediator assignment in Kenya (Chen, Lu, Ramos-Maqueda, and Sautman) and peer information sharing among conciliators in Peru (Chen, Ramos-Maqueda, Kim, and Silveira).

My secondary work in law and development is on human rights. I was an early contributor to a growing body of literature on the intersection of economics, religion, and culture (Chen and Hungerman 2014, JEBO). I showed how economic factors influence the religious provision of social insurance (Chen 2010, JPE) and social sanctions (Chen 2007, Institutions and Norms), particularly regarding gender violence (Chen 2020, JRD). In randomized control trials, we have found that progressive gender attitudes in teachers can lead to improved inter-gender cooperation and student achievement (Mehmood, Naseer, and Chen, JPE Micro R&R), but can also result in negative consequences such as domestic violence and mental stress for those holding novel views on rights (Mehmood, Naseer, and Chen, WP). We are currently studying the effects of mental health interventions for civil servants (Mehmood, Naseer, and Chen), the impact of changing beliefs about others (Kaur, Mehmood, Naseer, and Chen), and the social preferences and implicit attitudes of judges (Chen, Ramos-Maqueda, and Silviera). We have also shown that legitimacy of information source matters and conditional cash transfers do not for teacher’s Covid-19 vaccinations, which also has spillover impacts on student achievement (Mehmood, Naseer, and Chen WP). Likewise, government incentives are not effective in increasing fertility (Chen 2011, ITPF) or IVF rates (Chen and Cohen 2010, Minnesota Law Review), while market forces can substantially impact fertility decisions and inequality (Kremer and Chen 1999, AER P&P; 2002, JEG), suggesting that in some circumstances, temporarily increasing access to educational opportunities could permanently reduce inequality.