Boris Gershman

Curriculum Vitae

Contact Information

Department of Economics
American University
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Washington, DC 20016, USA

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Employment

American University, Washington, District of Columbia, USA
Associate Professor of Economics (with tenure), September 2018 – present
Assistant Professor of Economics, August 2012 – August 2018

Visiting Positions

George Mason University, Department of Economics, Fairfax, VA
Affiliate Faculty, Fall 2025

University of Warwick, Department of Economics, Coventry, UK
Visiting Scholar, December 2014 – August 2015

Max Planck Institute for Tax Policy and Public Finance, Munich, Germany
Visiting Scholar, March 2015

Education

Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, USA
Ph.D., Economics, May 2012
M.A., Economics, May 2008

New Economic School, Moscow, Russia
M.A., Economics, May 2007, *cum laude*

Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia
B.Sc., Economics, May 2005, *summa cum laude*

Research Fields

Economic Growth and Development, Economics of Culture, Political Economy

Journal Publications

Ancestry, Place, and Belief in Witchcraft as a Cause of Illness:
Evidence from Contemporary Africa
Evolution and Human Behavior, September 2026, *47* (5), 106944.

Fragmentation or Inequality: Ethnic Divisions and Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa
(with Ameesh Upadhyay).
Journal of Comparative Economics, June 2026, *54* (2), pp. 313–349.

Structural Change, Elite Capitalism, and the Emergence of Labor Emancipation
(with Quamrul Ashraf, Francesco Cinnirella, Oded Galor, and Erik Hornung).
Review of Economic Studies, March 2025, *92* (2), pp. 808–836.

Headhunting and Warfare in Austronesia:
A Phylogenetic Comparative Analysis (with Tinatin Mumladze).
Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization, April 2024, *220*, pp. 768–791.

Witchcraft Beliefs Around the World: An Exploratory Analysis
PLoS ONE, November 2022, *17* (11), e0276872.

Witchcraft Beliefs as a Cultural Legacy of the Atlantic Slave Trade:
Evidence from Two Continents
European Economic Review, February 2020, *122*, 103362.

Measuring Regional Ethnolinguistic Diversity in Sub-Saharan Africa:
Surveys vs. GIS (with Diego Rivera).
World Bank Economic Review, February 2020, *34* (S1), pp. S40-S45.

Subnational Diversity in Sub-Saharan Africa:
Insights from a New Dataset (with Diego Rivera).
Journal of Development Economics, July 2018, *133*, pp. 231–263.

Banks, Market Organization, and Macroeconomic Performance:
An Agent-Based Computational Analysis (with Quamrul Ashraf and Peter Howitt).
Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization, March 2017, *135*, pp. 143–180.

Witchcraft Beliefs and the Erosion of Social Capital:
Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa and Beyond.
Journal of Development Economics, May 2016, *120*, pp. 182–208.

How Inflation Affects Macroeconomic Performance:
An Agent-Based Computational Investigation (with Quamrul Ashraf and Peter Howitt).
Macroeconomic Dynamics, March 2016, *20* (2), pp. 558–581.

The Economic Origins of the Evil Eye Belief.
Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization, February 2015, *110*, pp. 119–144.

The Two Sides of Envy.
Journal of Economic Growth, December 2014, *19*(4), pp. 407–438.

Envy in the Process of Development: Implications for Social Relations and Conflict.
Economics of Peace and Security Journal, October 2013, *8*(2), pp. 13–19.

Macroeconomics in a Self-Organizing Economy (with Quamrul Ashraf and Peter Howitt).
Revue de l'OFCE / Debates and policies, 2012, *124*, pp. 43–65.

Book Chapters

Witchcraft Beliefs and Subjective Well-Being.
In *Economics, Religion and Public Policy.* Edited by Vladimir Maltsev and Nirvikar Singh.
World Scientific, 2026, Volume 1, Chapter 10, pp. 211–233.

Witchcraft Beliefs, Social Relations, and Development.
In *Handbook of Labor, Human Resources and Population Economics.* Edited by Klaus F. Zimmermann. Cham: Springer, 2023.

Long-Run Development and the New Cultural Economics.
In *Demographic Change and Long-Run Development.* Edited by M. Cervelatti and U. Sunde.
Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017, Chapter 9, pp. 221–261.

Book Reviews

Witch Hunts: Culture, Patriarchy, and Structural Transformation
(by Govind Kelkar and Dev Nathan).
Journal of Development Studies, 2023, *59* (8), pp. 1313–1314.

Working Papers

Common Ancestry, Uncommon Findings: Revisiting Cross-Cultural Research in Economics (with Tinatin Mumladze), revise and resubmit at the *Review of Economic Studies*

Research in Progress

Species Diversity and the Adoption of Agriculture
(with Katsuki Morihara)

Understanding the Cultural Landscape of Contemporary Africa: A Spatiophylogenetic Approach
(with Tinatin Mumladze)

Publications in Russian

Income Inequality and Economic Growth: An Empirical Survey.
Ekonomicheskaya Nauka Sovremennoi Rossii, July 2009, *2*, pp. 91–104.

Income Inequality and Economic Growth: A Theoretical Survey.
Ekonomika i Matematicheskie Metody, April 2009, *45*(2), pp. 19–30.

Research Presentations

In 2026: Washington Area Meeting of Economic Scientists, George Mason University (April)

In 2024: "Deep-rooted factors in comparative development" conference, Brown University (April); American University, Math-Stat Colloquium (April).

In 2023: Manhattan College, O'Malley School of Business (October); ASREC annual conference, Harvard University (March).

In 2022: Southern Economic Association annual meetings, Fort Lauderdale FL (November); 41st EBES conference, Berlin (October); ASREC annual conference, Chapman University (April).

In 2020: University of Wisconsin-Madison, Department of Agricultural & Applied Economics (December).

In 2018: Wake Forest University, Department of Economics (November); Williams College, Department of Economics (November); RASA IX annual conference, George Washington University (November).

In 2017: NES 25th anniversary conference, Moscow (December); EMSCH 50th anniversary conference, Moscow State University (December); Economic History and Development Workshop, George Mason University (August); Wageningen University, RHI seminar (June); Workshop on culture, diversity and economic development, Groningen (June); CSAE annual conference, University of Oxford (March); American University, School of International Service (March); ASREC 16th annual conference, Boston MA (February).

In 2016: Florida International University, Department of Economics (October); Ethnicity and diversity conference, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid (June); Development economics and policy conference, Heidelberg University (June); ASREC 15th annual conference, Chapman University (March).

In 2015: University of Sussex, Department of Economics (April); Queen's University Belfast, Management School (March).

In 2014: CESifo Venice summer institute, Venice International University (July); Summer workshop in economic growth, University of Warwick (July); Conference on deep-rooted factors in economic development, Brown University (May); American University, Department of Economics (April); ASREC 13th annual conference, Chapman University (March); Middle East Technical University, Department of Economics (January).

In 2013: Bilkent University, Department of Economics (December); EEA-ESEM congress, University of Gothenburg (August); University of Namur, CRED workshop (June); ASREC 12th annual conference, Arlington VA (April); Workshop on growth and development, University of Southern Denmark (March); University of Copenhagen, Department of Economics (March); George Mason University, Center for Study of Public Choice (January).

In 2012: University of Oxford, Department of Economics (February); Gettysburg College, Department of Economics (February); University of South Carolina, Moore School of Business (January); American University, Department of Economics (January).

In 2011: New Economic School, Moscow (December); Higher School of Economics, Moscow (December); NEUDC conference, Yale University (November); Midwest Economic Theory Meetings, Vanderbilt University (November); Brown University, Department of Economics (October); Williams College, Department of Economics (September).

In 2010 and earlier: Moscow State University, Department of Economics (December 2010); Southern Economic Association annual meetings, Atlanta GA (November 2010); New Economic School, NES/CEFIR seminar (July 2010); Brown University, Macro Lunch seminar (Novembers of 2007, 2009, 2010).

Teaching Experience

American University

Doctoral dissertation seminar (PhD). Instructor, since Spring 2026
GIS Applications in Empirical Economics (MS/PhD). Instructor, since Spring 2020
Macroeconomics II (PhD). Instructor, since Spring 2013
Intermediate Macroeconomics (undergraduate). Instructor, since Fall 2012

Brown University

Econometrics-II (advanced undergraduate). TA for Koen Jochmans, Fall 2010
Introduction to Econometrics (undergraduate). TA for Stefan Hoderlein, Spring 2010
Macroeconomics-II (doctoral). TA for Peter Howitt, Spring 2009
Macroeconomics-I (doctoral). TA for David Weil, Fall 2008

Honors, Awards, and Fellowships

American University

Mellon Faculty Award, Spring 2025, Spring 2021, Spring 2014
International Travel Award, Spring 2016, Spring 2013
Faculty Data Purchase Award, Spring 2015

5th Lindau Nobel Laureate Meeting on Economic Sciences, August 2014
Invited young scientist

Brown University

Merit Dissertation Fellowship, Fall 2011 – Spring 2012
Summer Research Fellowship, 2011
Abramson Prize for the third-year research paper, 2010
Teaching Certificate I, Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning, 2009
Stephen R. Ehrlich Fellowship, 2007–2008

Selected Media Coverage

"Unseliger Aberglaube: Hexenwahn früher und heute" (in German).
Stuttgarter Zeitung, October 6, 2024. Correspondent: Markus Brauer.

"Political Analysis Needs More Witchcraft."
The Atlantic, October 31, 2023. Correspondent: Brian Klaas.

"Tro på onda häxkonster fortfarande stark – Sverige sticker ut" (in Swedish).
Dagens Nyheter, April 8, 2023. Correspondent: Johan Nilsson.

"Ifølge nyt studie tror 40 procent på hekse. Har krisen næret overtroen?" (in Danish).
Kristeligt Dagblad, January 9, 2023. Correspondent: Alexander Dahl.

"Selon une vaste étude, un milliard de personnes croient en la sorcellerie!" (in French).
Science & Vie, December 30, 2022.

"Wie der moderne Hexenglaube unseren Wohlstand gefährdet" (in German).
National Geographic, December 2, 2022. Correspondent: Katarina Fischer.

"Aberglaube ist omnipräsent: Warum wir alle gerne Harry Potter wären" (in German).
Kurier, November 27, 2022. Correspondent: Susanne Mauthner-Weber.

"Mas que as há, há: quase metade dos portugueses acredita em bruxaria" (in Portuguese).
Público, November 25, 2022. Correspondent: Tiago Ramalho.

"Wer an Gott glaubt, glaubt häufig auch an Hexerei" (in German).
NZZ magazin, November 25, 2022. Correspondent: Patrick Imhasly.

"No Brasil 51 percent acreditam em bruxas" (in Portuguese).
O Globo, November 24, 2022. Correspondent: Rafael Garcia.

"Geloof in hekserij is nog altijd springlevend, zo blijkt uit nieuw onderzoek" (in Dutch).
Scientias, November 24, 2022. Correspondent: Caroline Kraaijvanger.

"Злое колдунство: как сглаз и порча вредят экономикам" (in Russian).
N+1, November 24, 2022. Correspondent: Ilya Ferapontov.

"Viele Menschen glauben weiterhin an die Existenz von Hexen" (in German).
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, November 24, 2022. Correspondent: Alice Lanzke.

"4 in 10 people worldwide believe in witches."
Live Science, November 23, 2022. Correspondent: Tia Ghose.

"Tremate, le streghe sono ancora tra noi" (in Italian).
la Repubblica, November 23, 2022. Correspondent: Elena Dusi.

"Russia has got a problem with witches."
Newsweek, November 23, 2022. Correspondent: Robyn White.

"The evil eye isn't just a trend. Here's what it means to me."
The Washington Post, July 10, 2022. Correspondent: Eda Uzunlar.

"Comment l'esclavage a contribué à l'essor de la sorcellerie" (in French).
National Geographic, March 12, 2020. Correspondent: Taïna Cluzeau.

"Hexenjagd im 21. Jahrhundert" (in German).
Bild, December 26, 2017. Correspondent: Christian Müller.

"Бес стагнации" (in Russian).
Kommersant Dengi, July 11, 2016. Correspondent: Vladimir Ruvinsky.

"O que bruxaria tem a ver com economia?" (in Portuguese).
Exame, June 29, 2016. Correspondent: João Pedro Caleiro.

"Why belief in witchcraft can do harm."
Live Science, May 12, 2016. Correspondent: Stephanie Pappas.

"Believing in witchcraft can slow economic progress, researcher discovers."
The Independent, May 10, 2016. Correspondent: Doug Bolton.

"Witchcraft belief creates antisocial cultures that are bad for business."
International Business Times, May 10, 2016. Correspondent: Léa Surugue.

"As origens econômicas do olho gordo" (in Portuguese).
Exame, September 13, 2015. Correspondent: João Pedro Caleiro.

"The hidden economic lessons of the evil eye."
Quartz, September 3, 2015. Correspondent: Matt Phillips.

"E assim nasceu o mau-olhado" (in Portuguese).
Correio Braziliense, June 14, 2015. Correspondent: Isabela de Oliveira.

"The case for the evil eye."
The Boston Globe, January 4, 2015. Correspondent: Kevin Lewis.

"What to do when the invisible hand stops working."
Bloomberg, June 5, 2013. Correspondent: Mark Buchanan.

Selected University Service

American University

- PhD program director, Department of Economics, 2026–present
- Placement director, Department of Economics, 2022–2025
- Dean's advisory committee, College of Arts and Sciences, 2017–2019
- Recruitment committee, School of International Service, 2016–2017
- Recruitment committee, Department of Economics, 2014–2016, 2019–2022
- Organizer of the Research Seminar Series, Department of Economics, 2012–2014

Other Professional Service

Peer reviewer for *Child Protection and Practice*, *Demography*, *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, *Economic Journal*, *Economics & Politics*, *European Economic Review*, *European Journal of Law and Economics*, *Evolution and Human Behavior*, *Journal of Comparative Economics*, *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology*, *Journal of Cultural Economics*, *Journal of Development Economics*, *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, *Journal of Economic Growth*, *Journal of Economics, Management and Religion*, *Journal of Elder Abuse & Neglect*, *Journal of Population Economics*, *Journal of the European Economic Association*, *Macroeconomic Dynamics*, *Nature Human Behaviour*, *Public Choice*, *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *Religion, Brain & Behavior*, *Review of Economic Studies*, *Review of Economics and Institutions*, *Social Science Research*, *Southern Economic Journal*, Springer – Major Reference Works, *World Development*

Grant reviewer for the *National Science Foundation (NSF)*, *Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO)*

Fellow of the *Global Labor Organization*

Fellow of *Spatial Structures in the Social Sciences* (S4), Brown University

LANGUAGES Russian (native), English (fluent), Spanish (intermediate), German (intermediate)

July 27, 2026