

Caterina Alfonso

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PERSONAL DATA

Date and place of birth: April 28th 1995 – Nicosia (EN)

Nationality: Italian

Address: Via del Borgo di San Pietro, 134 - Bologna (BO)

CURRENT POSITION

Bocconi University

Post-Doctoral Researcher at the Department of Economics

Milan, ITA

Apr. 2025 – Present

EDUCATION

University of Bologna

PhD in Economics

- Expected graduation: September 2026

Bologna, ITA

Nov. 2021 – Present

Northwestern University

Visiting Program, Department of Economics

Evanston, USA

Sep. 2024 – Mar. 2025

Bocconi University

MSc in Economic and Social Sciences (taught in English)

- Thesis: “Be Sicilians. The Legacy of Feudalism on Today’s Social Capital.”
- Final grade: 110/110 cum laude

Milan, ITA

Sep. 2017 – Dec. 2019

Universität Mannheim

Exchange Program, Department of Economics

Mannheim, DEU

Feb. 2019 – Jun. 2019

Bocconi University

BSc in Economic and Social Sciences (taught in Italian)

- Thesis: “Mafias Conquering the North of Italy: Criminal Penetration into Formal Economy and its Implications.”
- Final grade: 110/110

Milan, ITA

Sep. 2014 – Oct. 2017

Universiteit van Tilburg

Exchange Program, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration

Tilburg, NED

Jan. 2017 – Jun. 2017

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Quantitative Economic History, Long-run Development, Economics of Institutions and Culture, and Political Economy.

WORKING PAPERS

“Set Apart: Feudalism, Family Structure, and the Origins of Low Social Capital” (with M.P. Squicciarini)

Abstract: This paper shows how hierarchical and extractive institutions can persistently hinder the accumulation of local social capital by shaping family formation patterns. Focusing on feudal institutions in Sicily – one of Europe’s longest-lasting feudal societies – and using a novel municipality-level dataset, we document that areas historically governed as fiefdoms exhibited substantially lower levels of social capital. Historical evidence traces this pattern to the family structure fostered by feudal production relations, which favored the prevalence of small nuclear (SNu) families, while making cooperation and inter-family solidarity inefficient and unfavorable. Consistent with this argument, we find that feudal municipalities display significantly smaller and fewer co-resident families. The presence of these families is, in turn, associated with lower levels of social capital. These findings highlight how family structures typically associated with cooperative outcomes (e.g., nuclear families) can have a negative long-lasting impact on social capital accumulation, if embedded in hierarchical and extractive institutional environments.

“The Making of Italians: Institutional Response to Disasters and Nation-building.”

Abstract: The emergence of nation-states posed the problem of creating national identities. This paper examines how institutional responsiveness to local shocks – proxied by earthquakes – fosters a higher a sense of nationhood in the aided population right after the Italian unification in 1861. Results show that only in areas where the government provided

post-earthquake relief did the population significantly reduce draft evasion, used here as a proxy for local nationalistic sentiments. Results using electoral data suggest that while local elites remained largely unresponsive to post-earthquake state intervention, the masses did react when they were finally enfranchised in 1913. Finally, the paper suggests forward-looking electoral incentives – rather than rewards for past electoral support – drove the government response.

WORKS IN PROGRESS

“Discrimination and Institutional Change: Evidence from 19th-Century France” (with G. Lanzara, S. Lazzaroni, P. Masella and M.P. Squicciarini)

“Through the Mill: Tax Compliance and Political Representation in Post-Unitary Italy” (with M. Ruzzante)

“The Medieval Origins of the Entrepreneurial Culture.” (with S. Di Addario)

WORKSHOP & CONFERENCES PRESENTATIONS

2023: ENS de Lyon (Lyon), Bocconi University (Milan), ASE Annual Meeting (Naples)

2024: Northwestern University (Evanston)

2025: ASREC Conference (Washington D.C.), World Economic History Congress (Lund), Bocconi University (Milan), NSE PhD Workshop (Naples), University of Siena (Siena), VPDE PhD Workshop (Turin), UniCatt Political Economy Workshop (Milan)

TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIP

Econometrics (University of Bologna a.y. 2022/23, 2023/24, 2024/25, 2025/26)

Development: Economics and Financial Markets (University of Bologna a.y. 2022/23, 2023/24, 2024/25, 2025/26)

Advanced Economic Policy and Methods (University of Bologna a.y. 2021/22)

AWARDS

2020 Francesca Carnevali Prize (Italian Association for Economic History), for the best thesis in Economic History

2020 Bonaldo Stringher Scholarship (Bank of Italy), resulted as “Particularly deserving”

PAST RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Bank of Italy, Economic History Division

Rome, ITA

Research Assistant

Jul. 2021 – Oct. 2021

- Main activities: Construction of municipality-level and individual-level dataset using historical and modern sources and empirical analysis for the research project “The Legacy of Medieval Communes on Italian Development during XX-XXI cent.”.

Bocconi University, IGIER (Innocenzo Gasparini Institute for Economic Research)

Milan, ITA

Research Assistant

Jan. 2020 – Jun. 2021

- Main activities: Collection of historical and modern micro-level data from primary and secondary sources, using also OCR techniques, construction of ready-to-use textual dataset and related econometric analysis.
- Beneficiary of an annual research grant (Jul. 2020 – Jun. 2021) as part of the 2017 PRIN Project: “Religious and Racial Discrimination Attitudes: Evidence from a Contemporary and a Historical context.”

OTHER WORK EXPERIENCE

CORERAS (Regional Center for Applied Research and Experimentation)

Palermo, ITA

Internship

Jun. 2018 – Sep. 2018

- Main activities: Research on the recent developments in food labelling legislation and its impact on consumers’ habits and health.

ISTAT (Italian National Bureau of Statistics)

Palermo, ITA

Internship

Jun. 2016 – Sep. 2016

- Main activities: Data analysis and application of territorial statistics to study the rural internal areas of Sicily.

LANGUAGE SKILLS

Italian: Native language

English: Highly proficient in both spoken and written English (TOEFL 110/120 C1-Level, Feb. 2021)

French: Good communication skills (passed B1 Business exam at Bocconi University, Jun. 2019)

COMPUTER SKILLS

Microsoft Office: Strong command (ECDL Core, Feb. 2014)

Statistical software:

- **Stata, R:** Strong command;
- **Python, OpenAI:** Good command;
- **Matlab, SPSS:** Basic command.

Geographical data analysis software:

- **Qgis:** Strong command

INTERESTS AND OTHER INFORMATION

Volunteering in collaboration with:

- Avis (Association for Blood Donation) from 2010 to the present day;
- Save the Children, at its pavilion at EXPO Milan 2015;
- ACR (Catholic Association for Children), as educator for children from 6 to 14 years, from 2010 to 2014;
- Die Tafel (German foodbank based in Mannheim), during my Erasmus in Spring 2019.

Staff member of the European Union Pavilion at EXPO Milan 2015;

Students representative of the I.S.I.S. G. Salerno in Gangi (PA) from 2012 to 2014;

Hobbies: Reading historical novels, in particular about classical history, and thriller; travelling and participating in cultural events, especially expositions and theatre's performances.

Last update: January 15, 2026

Caterina Alfano