

ISSA LUNA-PLA Ph.D.

New York, NY

<https://www.issalunapla.info/> | issalunapla@gmail.com | English / Spanish

SUMMARY

Research analyst, criminologist, and legal scholar with 10+ years of experience conducting quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method research on criminal justice, corruption, institutional misconduct, and systemic inequality. Skilled in analyzing complex datasets, legal records, and governance systems to identify patterns related to violence, recidivism, institutional harm, and public accountability. Experienced in translating empirical findings into rigorous reports, data visualizations, and evidence-based narratives that support policy reform, legal strategy, and public engagement. Background in transparency and access-to-information policy design, with a strong commitment to racial equity, civil rights, and evidence-based criminal justice reform. Proven ability to collaborate with interdisciplinary teams, civil society organizations, researchers, journalists, and community stakeholders to advance impactful research and public-facing initiatives.

CORE SKILLS

- Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method research
- Statistical data analysis and dataset management
- Data collection, cleaning, validation, and analysis across complex datasets
- Research on criminal justice, institutional practices, and systemic inequality
- Investigative research, complaint analysis, and pattern identification
- Data visualization and communication for policy and public audiences
- Network analysis and systems-based research methodologies
- Drafting reports, research memos, policy briefs, and public-facing materials
- Critical evaluation and synthesis of empirical and legal research
- Stakeholder engagement, interviews, and interdisciplinary collaboration
- Community-centered and equity-oriented research approaches
- Collaboration with legal, policy, academic, and advocacy teams
- Project coordination, organization, and deadline-driven research management
- Strong written communication, analytical reasoning, and problem-solving skills

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Independent Researcher | Senior Data & Policy Analyst

2024 – Present

- Analyze large, complex datasets to identify behavioral patterns, risks, and engagement dynamics across institutional and public-facing systems.

- Design and query analytical models combining administrative data, user interaction indicators, and network-based metrics.
- Translate quantitative findings into narratives and visual outputs tailored for journalists, editors, and policy audiences.
- Support evidence-based decision-making by testing assumptions, validating indicators, and explaining uncertainty and limitations clearly.

Columbia University – New York

Senior Research Scholar | 2021 – 2024

- Produced data-driven insights on corruption, accountability, and public engagement using multi-source datasets spanning 80+ institutions.
- Designed audience-oriented indicators to evaluate reach, uptake, and impact of public information initiatives.
- Partnered with interdisciplinary teams (journalists, data scientists, social scientists) to transform analysis into accessible editorial outputs and public reports.
- Led analytical reporting for international events reaching 1,000+ participants, integrating quantitative findings into editorial narratives.

National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM)

Tenured Researcher – Legal Research Institute | 2004 – 2024

- Led the Corruption and Impunity Observatory, overseeing data collection, analysis, and reporting workflows supporting public-interest research.
- Developed and maintained performance indicators, engagement metrics, and transparency dashboards for digital publications and platforms.
- Designed and delivered data-driven courses on access to information, transparency, and digital governance, reaching 34,000+ online learners.
- Regularly communicated analytical findings to non-technical audiences including journalists, civil society, and policymakers.

Academic Dean | 2018 – 2021

- Directed data-based institutional analytics systems to measure audience engagement, productivity, and impact across digital platforms.
- Supervised dashboard development tracking user behavior, satisfaction, and content reach.
- Achieved an 80% increase in website traffic by aligning content strategy with audience insights and performance data.

SELECTED ANALYTICAL & DATA-DRIVEN PUBLICATIONS

- **Prosecution of complex criminal networks: a multilevel ERGMs approach to CICIG's judicial cases.** (2025), Journal of Quantitative Criminology. [Link](#). (Waxenecker H., Luna-Pla, I. and Nicolás-Carlock J.R.).
- **Data Journalism work awarded** “Fantasmas del Erario: Cuatro Sexenios de Destinar Recursos Públicos a Empresas Inexistentes” (Ghosts of the Treasury: Four Six-year Terms of Allocating Public Resources to Nonexistent Companies) — recognized as a Winner of the 2026 Sigma Awards by the [Global Investigative Journalism Network](#) (GIJN).
- **Unmasking and Quantifying Power Structures: How Network Analysis Enhances Peace and StateBuilding Efforts.** (2024) Data and Policy Blog, Cambridge. [Link](#) (Luna-Pla I.).
- **Network Analysis in Peace and State Building: Revealing Power Elites.** (2024). Data and Policy, Cambridge. DOI: [Link](#) (Luna Pla I.).
- **Organized Crime Behavior of Shell-Company Networks in Procurement: Prevention Insights for Policy and Reform.** (2023). Trends in Organized Crime, Springer. DOI: [Link](#) (Nicolás-Carlock J.R., Luna-Pla I.).
- **Conspiracy of Corporate Networks in Corruption Scandals.** (2021). Frontiers in Physics. Social Physics 9:667471. DOI: [Link](#) (Nicolás-Carlock J.R., Luna-Pla I.).
- **Corruption and Complexity: A Scientific Framework for the Analysis of Corruption Networks.** (2020). Applied Network Science 5 13, Springer Open. DOI: [Link](#) (Luna-Pla I., Nicolás-Carlock J.R.).

(Full list available upon request)

EDUCATION & DATA TRAINING

- PhD, Information Law – University of the West, Mexico
- Oxford University, Diploma, Program of Comparative Media Law & Policy, U.K.
- MSc, Human Rights – London School of Economics and Political Science, U.K.
- BA, Communication Studies – Ibero-American University, Mexico
- University of Texas at Austin, Visiting Professor, USA
- Mathematics for Social Scientists – University of Essex, U.K.
- Network Analysis for Social Sciences – Applied Mathematics Institute, UNAM, Mexico

LANGUAGES

- Spanish (Native)
- English (Fluent)