

# Overview of Ongoing Research Projects

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I am an applied economist employing experimental methods to address policy-relevant questions in development, education, labor, and gender economics. I am a [J-PAL](#) Faculty Affiliate (since July 2023) and an [EGAP](#) member (since 2010). I am a co-editor at *Economic Inquiry*. My work has been funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, the Russell Sage Foundation, the Spencer Foundation, the World Bank, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the IZA G<sup>2</sup>LM|LIC program, the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) and the US State Department. I currently have three primary lines of research, within the broad fields of: 1) political economy; 2) development economics; 3) economics of education.

My early work focused primarily on the first line of research, and employed laboratory experiments to investigate individuals' decision to engage in corruption. In the field, much of my past work focused on subpar behavior of health and education service providers in low-income countries, and on service recipients' willingness and ability to hold them accountable. I currently have three completed papers and one ongoing project within this line of research. One paper ("[Activating Change: The Role of Information and Beliefs in Social Activism](#)" with F. Afridi, A. Basistha and A. Dhillon) employs an online survey experiment in India to examine the drivers of *remote* social activism, i.e., activism that does not require in-person engagement, such as petition signing, donations to NGOs and engagement with video campaigns. A second related paper ("[Can Crises Affect Citizen Activism? Evidence from a Pandemic](#)" with the same coauthors) uses quasi-experimental methods to test the impact of the (largely unexpected) second wave of the pandemic in India on social activism aimed at reducing fraud and corruption in the health sector. A third paper ("[Proud to belong: The impact of ethics training on police officers in Ghana](#)" with Donna Harris, Oana Borcan, Hanry Telli, Bruno Schettini and Stefan Dercon) employs an RCT in Ghana to test the impact of an ethics training program for traffic police officers on unethical behavior. The primary outcomes are measured through a survey and an incentivized cheating game. In the past year, we were able to obtain partial administrative data from the Ghana Police to complement our impact evaluation. Another ongoing project within this line of research ("[Who self-select into committees: The pro-social or the corrupt?](#)" with former student Andy Cao and Dmitry Ryvkin), employs a laboratory experiment to investigate self-selection into committees managing public funds. We ask, theoretically and experimentally, whether and when the most pro-socially motivated or the most corrupt individuals self-select into committees.

My second line of research focuses primarily on gender inequalities in education and labor market participation in low-income countries. An [ongoing project in Somalia](#) (joint with Elijah Kipchumba, Catherine Porter and Munshi Sulaiman) employs an RCT to examine whether exposure to male or female role models (college students) affects gender attitudes and education aspirations of primary school students. The intervention was conducted in Spring 2018; we recently collected a third wave of follow-up data, which will allow us to also assess the impact of the role models on students' performance in grade 8 standardized exit exams. An [ongoing project in Uganda](#) (joint with Kjetil Bjorvatn, Shymal Chowdhury, Catalina Franco and Munshi Sulaiman) evaluates the impact of female leadership in Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs). Specifically, in collaboration with BRAC Uganda, we implemented a field experiment consisting in nudging VSLAs to appoint a new Chairperson. In randomly selected VSLAs, the nudge was to

appoint a woman; in other randomly selected VSLAs the nudge was to appoint a new male chairperson; in a third randomly selected group of VSLAs, we implemented the female leadership nudge together with a mentoring intervention that put new female leaders in contact by phone with successful female leaders of other VSLAs. We are currently collecting the endline data. Another [current project in Northern Uganda](#) (joint with Alessandra Cassar, Eeshani Kandpal, Miranda Lambert and Christine Mbabazi) employs lab-in-the-field experiments and surveys to examine the long-term impact of extreme war victimization (i.e., *childhood abduction*) on women's mental health, preferences, and socio-economic outcomes. A follow-up study (*about to be fielded*) will assess through an RCT the effects of unconditional cash transfers versus coaching versus mental health counseling on the well-being of a larger sample of victimized women.

In the past year, I have expanded my work in development economics (which so far has focused primarily on countries in Sub-Saharan Africa) to South Asia. Together with Raymond Robertson (Bush School, TAMU), Farzana Afridi and Hamna Ahmed, I was awarded an IZA|G2LM large grant to investigate (through surveys and RCTs) barriers to women's career advancement in the apparel industry in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. This work will take place in collaboration with the H&M Group. Also with Raymond Robertson and Hamna Ahmed, I received funding from the US State Department – through a collaborative agreement – to design and implement research aimed at facilitating women's active participation in the Green Transition in Pakistan's apparel industry.

My third line of research focuses on the economics of education, asking primarily what interventions could succeed in diversifying male- and white-dominated fields of study. In my previous work (“[Gender differences in the choice of major: The importance of female role models](#)”), Catherine Porter and I found that in-person exposure to female role models could attract more women into economics. An ongoing [project](#) (with Jonathan Meer) employs an RCT targeting high school counselors in Texas with the aim of increasing awareness about the economics major. We have recently received funding from the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) and CSWEP to evaluate our intervention using the Texas Education Research Center data. Another [ongoing project](#), joint with Daniel Gomez-Vasquez, employs an RCT aimed at increasing retention among under-represented economics majors at TAMU through encouragement emails sent on behalf of the economics department. In an [ongoing project in Peru](#) (joint with Marcos Agurto and Sudipta Sarangi) involving high school students, we employ an RCT conducted through Instagram to attract more women to the engineering major. New work (joint with Celeste Carruthers, Kalena Cortes and Ishara Casellas Connors) will examine the impact of coaching on student transfers from community colleges to 4-year colleges.

Finally, I have ongoing experimental/behavioral projects aimed at identifying or correcting biases in hiring or career advancement. [One project](#) (joint with Elira Kuka) uses an RCT to evaluate the impact of a streamlined mentoring program (the [Adopt a Paper](#) program) on the academic success of junior faculty in economics. [Another project](#) (joint with Tim Salmon, Daniel Gomez-Vasquez and Miranda Lambert) employs a laboratory experiment to assess the impact of different modes of communication – in-person, video call, audio-only call and instant messaging – on the dynamics of work relationships between team members of different genders. A final [project](#) is joint with Daniel Gomez-Vasquez and extends his dissertation work on the drivers of hiring biases against Black and Hispanic workers.