

Till Wicker

Tilburg University

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Placement Officer

Prof. David Schindler
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Education

2022 to present	<u>Ph.D. in Economics</u> , Tilburg University Expected Completion: May 2026
2020–2022	Research Master in Economics, Tilburg University <i>CentER Scholar (with Distinction)</i>
2015–2018	Bachelor's degree in Economics and Management, University of Oxford

Research Interests

Development, Behavioral & Labor

Research Visits

2025	Department of Economics, University of California, Berkeley Host: Prof. Edward Miguel
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Job Market Paper

Discrimination as Retaliation: Past Experiences and the Dynamics of Discrimination

Discrimination remains pervasive across societies, yet little is known about how past experiences of discrimination shape future discriminatory behavior, and hence the dynamics of discrimination. This paper introduces and empirically documents a new mechanism: retaliatory discrimination, whereby individuals are more likely to discriminate against a group after experiencing or perceiving discrimination from members of that group. Guided by a theoretical framework that models retaliatory discrimination alongside taste-based and statistical discrimination, I conduct experiments with refugees in Uganda and men in the United States. These provide empirical support for retaliatory discrimination, driven by motivated beliefs, while ruling out other mechanisms. The findings reveal that retaliatory discrimination can generate potential unintended effects of the reversal of affirmative action policies and provide a micro-foundation for understanding anticipated discrimination. Finally, I discuss and experimentally evaluate a novel mitigation strategy to reduce the consequences of retaliatory discrimination.

Working Papers

Mental Accounting and Cash Transfers: Experimental Evidence from a Humanitarian Setting (w/ P. Dalton & D. van Soest)

Stage 1 Acceptance at the *Journal of Development Economics*

We conducted a field experiment to test whether a light-touch intervention offering refugee households in Uganda the option to earmark cash transfers for specific purposes can help them accumulate capital and increase income. Households received monthly unconditional transfers over seven months. Treatment households could allocate their transfers across four labeled envelopes— *Education*, *Health*, *Investments*, and *Other* — while control households received the same monthly amount in a single, unlabeled envelope. Take-up was high: 93% of treatment

households opted in, and 37% were still using the envelopes a year after the program ended. One year later, treatment households had invested 26% more in income-generating activities—particularly in lumpy assets—leading to an 18% increase in income and a 22% increase in savings. Households who actively chose how to allocate the transfer, rather than receiving a suggested allocation, engaged more with the commitment device and experienced greater benefits.

Winsorizing and Trimming with Subgroups

Revise and Resubmit at the *Journal of Development Economics*

Winsorizing and trimming are used to minimize the effects of outliers on estimated treatment effects. The typical approach winsorizes/trimms the tails of the whole sample, even if there are heterogeneous subgroups within the sample — like a treatment and control group in Randomized Controlled Trials. An alternative approach — *Stratified Winsorizing/Trimming* — winsorizes subgroups separately, ensuring that an equal proportion of observations are winsorized/trimmed per subgroup. Monte Carlo simulations of an RCT illustrate that *Stratified Winsorizing/Trimming* reduces the treatment effect bias and risk of Type II errors compared to the traditional approach, although at the cost of a greater likelihood of Type I errors. Applications to Angelucci et al. (2023) and Jack et al. (2023) illustrate that the chosen winsorizing/trimming technique can affect the magnitude and statistical significance of treatment effects. Practical guidelines for researchers wanting to winsorize/trim a sample that consists of heterogeneous subgroups are discussed.

Labor Market Signals: The Role of Large Language Models (w/ K. Abbas Nejad, G. Musillo & N. Zaccaria)

Revise and Resubmit at the *Journal of Labor Economics*

Large Language Models (LLMs) are transforming the labor market, including hiring decisions. This paper examines their impact on the signals job-seekers send to potential employers through two field experiments focusing on cover letters. We find that LLMs enhance signal quality, especially benefiting lower-quality applicants, yet these gains do not boost interview invitations because they are concentrated in standardized, less influential sections of the cover letter. When recruiters learn of LLM usage, they place greater value on high-quality, human-crafted letters. Hence, LLMs reduce the informativeness of signals, potentially increasing inefficiencies in labor market matching.

Threshold Public Goods Games with Temporal Contribution Dynamics

Climate scientists agree that early greenhouse-gas reductions are more effective than identical cuts made later. We embed this insight in a multi-round “Climate Protection Game,” comparing a standard linear weighting of emissions cuts over time (*Linear*) with a design where early reductions yield greater climate benefits (*Step*). In a laboratory experiment with 300 participants, the *Step* treatment encouraged larger early contributions and higher individual payoffs, though both treatments reached the mitigation threshold similarly often. Evolutionary Game Theory simulations support these findings, in line with theoretical predictions. The results suggest that environmental policies incentivizing early emissions reductions can achieve better environmental and welfare outcomes.

Work in Progress

Graduation Approach versus Cash Transfers Among Refugees (w/ A. Ruža)

Funding Secured, RCT ongoing, endline scheduled for Fall 2026

Humanitarian organizations are faced with the dual challenge of decreasing funds, and increasing needs. Therefore, cost-effective policies are more important than ever. This paper evaluates two cost-effective policies through a RCT among refugees in Kyangwali refugee settlement, Uganda. 377 refugee households are randomized into a 5-month-long unconditional cash transfer program, or a two-year Graduation-like program, benchmarked against a group of refugees that do not receive humanitarian assistance. As such, this project provides insights into the differential effectiveness of short-term vs. longer-term humanitarian assistance. Surveys are conducted every 6 months, for three years.

Vocational Training for Refugee Youths (w/ D. Tommasi)

Funding Secured, RCT ongoing, endline scheduled for Fall 2026

This RCT evaluates a non-formal vocational training program in Uganda, targeting young South Sudanese refugees residing in Uganda’s Rhino Camp refugee settlement who intend to return to their country. The intervention comprises of non-formal vocational training, apprenticeships, and a start-up kit, with the overarching goal of fostering socio-economic integration and enabling sustainable livelihood opportunities, either in Uganda, or upon

return to South Sudan. Participants are followed for 18 months after the vocational training program, in 3-month intervals, generating a novel panel dataset.

Internalizing Edutainment: First the Messenger, Then the Message

Pre-Analysis Plan written

To what extent do plot comprehension and character identification shape the effectiveness of edutainment interventions? Motivated by replicating and extending Berg and Zia (2017), where I find that positive impacts of edutainment were concentrated among viewers already familiar with the show, this study isolates the causal roles of processing fluency and character identification. I propose a lab-in-the-field Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) in Uganda using MTV Shuga. Participants will be randomized into three groups: (T1) view only Season 2, (T2) receive a Season 1 synopsis before Season 2, or (T3) receive both a synopsis and character information before Season 2. This design exogenously varies familiarity with the plot and characters, allowing me to estimate their impact on HIV-related knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors, as well as the cognitive and emotional mechanisms that underlie them.

The Value of Volunteering Among Refugees (*w/ P. Dalton, D. van Soest & N. Seimel*)

Funding secured, baseline scheduled for May 2026

With humanitarian aid decreasing, refugees increasingly need to rely on their community for assistance. This is particularly pronounced for highly vulnerable refugees, such as new arrivals, new mothers, and those with ailing mental and physical health. Volunteering presents a promising opportunity to foster social cohesion, while supporting the community's most vulnerable, and improving the psychological well-being and self-satisfaction of the volunteer. This theory of change is evaluated through a RCT among 720 refugees in Kyangwali refugee settlement.

Mis-Reporting Treatment Effects on Weighted Indices in Terms of Standard Deviations

Empirical researchers often report treatment effects on constructed indices following the approach of Kling et al. (2007) or Anderson (2008) in standard deviation units. However, most indices have a variance below one, as I show using theoretical derivations, Monte Carlo simulations, and empirical applications to published studies. This subsequently biases reported effect sizes downward. I propose a re-normalization approach to restore interpretability in terms of standard deviations while preserving statistical significance.

Grants, Scholarships, and Awards

2024	Wellspring Philanthropic Fund (Co-PI), \$100,000
2024	Fondazione San Zeno (Co-PI), €10,000
2024	OpenAI Researcher Access Program (Co-PI), \$2,000
2024	IPA Displaced Livelihoods Initiative (PI), \$10,000
2023	Excellent Teacher Award, Tilburg University (<i>only Economics Ph.D. recipient</i>)
2022	NWO Open Competition (Co-I), €762,594

Seminar & Conference Presentations

2025	UC Berkeley Development Lunch, PACDEV, MWIEDC, Economics Job Market Bootcamp (Bologna), G ² LM—LIC/path2dev/BREAD Conference on Development Economics, UCL Enter Seminar, Dutch Development Economics Ph.D. Workshop, Tilburg University
2024	Maastricht University Interdisciplinary Brownbag Seminar of Behavioral Sciences, Lund University Ph.D. Workshop on Development Research, Tilburg University Department of Economics Internal Seminar,
2023	Development Economics & Economic History Research Group RGS Doctoral Conference, Dutch Development Economics Workshop, KVS New Paper Sessions, Summer School in Development Economics, TIBER Symposium

Refereeing

Food Policy, Journal of Policy Analysis & Management, Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization, Journal of Economic Psychology

Teaching Experience

Summer 2025	Tutorial <i>Development Economics</i> , graduate level, Tilburg University
Winter 2025	Lecture <i>Econometrics for Development Economics</i> , undergraduate level, Tilburg University
Summer 2024	Tutorial <i>Development Economics</i> , graduate level, Tilburg University (4.8/5.0)
Winter 2024	Tutorial <i>Development Economics</i> , undergraduate level, Tilburg University (4.9/5.0)
Winter 2023	Tutorial <i>Development Economics</i> , undergraduate level, Tilburg University (4.9/5.0)
2022 –	Thesis Supervision, undergraduate level, Tilburg University

Voluntary Positions

2024-2025	Chair, Tilburg Ph.D. Platform
2023-2025	Economics and Management Representative, Tilburg Ph.D. Platform
2023-2024	Co-organizer, Dutch Development Economics Ph.D. Workshop/Conference
2020 –	Economics Research Master and Ph.D. Representative, Graduate Student Society

Employment

2021	Research Assistant for Prof. David Schindler, Tilburg University (The Netherlands)
2019-2020	Economic Recovery Officer, Danish Refugee Council (Uganda)
2019	Intern and Consultant, German Development Corporation (Tunisia & Libya)
2018	Visiting Associate, Boston Consulting Group (Germany)
2017	Summer Consulting Intern, Oliver Wyman (The Netherlands)

Computer Skills

LaTeX, Stata, R, Qualtrics, Kobo, SurveyCTO, oTree

Languages

German (native), English (fluent), Dutch (fluent), Portuguese (beginner)

References

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