

# Akanksha Vardani

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## CONTACT INFORMATION

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS  
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## PLACEMENT CHAIRS

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## PLACEMENT ADMINISTRATORS

Amy Devine  
aed2152@columbia.edu

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## EDUCATION

### Columbia University, New York

Ph.D in Economics

*2019-2025 (Expected)*

M.Phil in Economics

*2022*

M.A. in Economics

*2021*

### Delhi School of Economics (DSE), New Delhi

Master of Arts in Economics

*2018*

### Indraprastha College for Women(IPCW), University of Delhi

Bachelor of Arts (Honors) in Economics

*2016*

### Springdales School, Pusa Road, New Delhi

Senior Secondary

*2013*

## RESEARCH FIELDS

**Development Economics, Family Economics, Public Economics**

## WORK IN PROGRESS

### **A House for Two : Empowering Women with Property Rights (JMP)**

Abstract: Improving women's access to property ownership is a commonly employed policy to enhance their empowerment, yet the evidence on its impact remains mixed. One key reason may be the failure to distinguish between documented rights and effective rights - the latter encompassing both formal rights and their recognition, particularly by women and those around them, especially husbands. This study investigates the impact of strengthening women's effective property rights on empowerment through a field experiment in rural Maharashtra. I work in a setting where women are documented owners but lack effective rights, and beliefs about these rights vary within couples. I implement a randomized awareness campaign across 1,783 households, providing both spouses in the treatment group with information on women's property rights and a physical copy of the ownership document. The campaign significantly improves beliefs about women's property rights, increasing expenditure on women-specific goods by 40% and reducing men's alcohol consumption by 33%, though it has no overall effect on domestic violence. I then develop and test an intra-household bargaining model, which highlights the role of pre-existing differences in spousal beliefs. Consistent with the model's predictions, the strongest consumption effects are observed in households with the lowest initial beliefs about women's ownership, while reductions in domestic violence occur in households where the husband's initial beliefs are lower than the wife's. By focusing on effective property rights, this study clarifies the link between women's property rights and empowerment, offering insights into how beliefs could explain the mixed evidence in the literature.

### **How do political connections affect property tax compliance?**

with Aneesha Parvathaneni

Abstract: How does being connected to a local elected leader affect property tax compliance? Using a close election difference-in-discontinuities design, we quantify the effect of being connected to a local elected leader on tax liability and compliance. We use novel administrative data on property taxation from an Indian district and find that citizens connected to local elected leaders are 45 percentage points more likely to remit taxes and remit 351% more in taxes. We also find that these results are partially driven by enforcement as those who are connected are 30.8 percentage points more likely to face fines and face 247% more in fines. Among those who are connected to the local elected leader, we find that these results are driven by poorer property owners.

**Unpacking Willingness to Pay as a Measure of Women's Empowerment**  
with Aletheia Donald, William Hickman and Berber Kramer

**From Skills to Jobs: How Community and Household Networks Impact Women's Workforce Entry**  
with Tushar Kundu

**Signaling in Female Education**  
with Tushar Kundu

RESEARCH  
EXPERIENCE AND  
INTERNSHIPS

**Research Assistant** **2020-2021**  
*Supervisors: Michael Best and Evan Sadler*  
**Department of Economics, Columbia University, New York**

**Research Assistant** **2017-2019**  
*Supervisor: Rohini Somanathan*  
**Department of Economics, Delhi School of Economics, New Delhi**

**Research Analyst Intern** **2015**  
**India Institute, New Delhi**

**Research Intern** **2014-2015**  
**Consumers India, New Delhi**

TEACHING  
EXPERIENCE

**Teaching Fellow, Columbia University**  
Intermediate Microeconomics (Undergraduate) **Fall 2022**  
Microeconomics (MA) **Spring 2022**  
Intermediate Microeconomics (Undergraduate) **Fall 2021**  
Math Camp (PhD) **Summer 2021**

AWARDS  
AND HONORS

SurveyCTO Primary Data Collection Research Grant (Honorable Mention) **2024**  
Wueller Pre-Dissertation Award for Best 4th-year Proposal, Columbia University **2023**  
Reubens Travel and Research Award, Columbia University **2023**  
Wueller Award for Best TA for MA Program, Columbia University **2022**  
Wueller Award for Best TA (Runners up) for Undergraduate Courses, Columbia University **2022**  
Exim Bank Scholarship, DSE **2016-2018**  
National (CAS) Scholarship Internal, DSE **2016-2018**  
Rai Bahadur Raghunath Sahai Memorial Prize, IPCW **2016**  
Rewa Dhawan Memorial Scholarship, IPCW **2013-2016**  
Nagendra Nath Majumdar Memorial Prize, IPCW **2016**  
Principal's Honour Roll, IPCW **2015**

FELLOWSHIPS

**NBER Gender in the Economy Fellowship** **2023-2024**

RESEARCH GRANTS

**Weiss Fund** (with Aneesha Parvathaneni) **2024**  
**CDEP Student Research Grant**, Columbia University **2023**  
**PER Experiment Grant**, Columbia University **2023**  
**CDEP Student Research Grant**, Columbia University **2022**  
**PER Experiment Grant**, Columbia University **2022**  
**PER Research Fellow Summer Grant**, Columbia University **2020**

FIELDWORK  
EXPERIENCE

Running a randomised control trial (RCT) in India to study the impact of land ownership on women's empowerment. *May 2023-present*

Conducted a household-level survey on women's bargaining power across 30 villages, covering 150 households in Pune, India. *October 2022*

Surveyed the workers of the informal wire stripping industry in Seelampur, Delhi. *March 2015*

Surveyed the workers of the informal garment sector in Kapashera, Delhi. *December 2013*

ACADEMIC  
PRESENTATIONS

**European Association of Young Economists Annual Meeting** *2024*

**Imperial College PhD Conference** *2024*

**NBER Summer Institute** *2023*

**14th Annual Conference on Economic Growth and Development** *2018*

**4th Annual Center for research on the Economics of Climate, Food, Energy and Environment (CECFEE) Research and Policy Workshop** *2018*

**12th South Asian Economics Students' Meet** *2016*

TECHNICAL SKILLS

STATA, R, Python, L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X

LANGUAGE SKILLS

**English** (Fluent), **Hindi** (Native Speaker), **French** (Intermediate) and **German** (Beginner)

REFERENCES

**Cristian Pop-Eleches**  
Professor  
School of International and Public Affairs  
Columbia University  
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**Pierre-André Chiappori**  
E. Rowan and Barbara Steinschneider  
Professor of Economics  
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**Michael Best**  
Assistant Professor  
Department of Economics  
Columbia University  
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**Bernard Salanié**  
Sami Mnaymneh Professor of Economics,  
Director of the Master's Program  
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**Jack Willis**  
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