

Econometrica, Vol. 85, No. 5 (September, 2017), 1373–1432

RESEARCH DESIGN MEETS MARKET DESIGN: USING CENTRALIZED ASSIGNMENT FOR IMPACT EVALUATION

ATILA ABDULKADIROĞLU

Department of Economics, Duke University and NBER

JOSHUA D. ANGRIST

Department of Economics, MIT and NBER

YUSUKE NARITA

Department of Economics and Cowles Foundation, Yale University

PARAG A. PATHAK

Department of Economics, MIT and NBER

A growing number of school districts use centralized assignment mechanisms to allocate school seats in a manner that reflects student preferences and school priorities. Many of these assignment schemes use lotteries to ration seats when schools are oversubscribed. The resulting random assignment opens the door to credible quasi-experimental research designs for the evaluation of school effectiveness. Yet the question of how best to separate the lottery-generated randomization integral to such designs from non-random preferences and priorities remains open. This paper develops easily-implemented empirical strategies that fully exploit the random assignment embedded in a wide class of mechanisms, while also revealing why seats are randomized at one school but not another. We use these methods to evaluate charter schools in Den-

