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Education

Harvard University

Ph.D. Economics, 2018 to 2024 (expected)

Harvard Environmental Economics Program Pre-Doctoral Fellow

Brown University

B.A. Economics (honors), Environmental Studies, 2016

Fields

Primary: Public Economics, Environmental Economics

Secondary: Labor Economics

References

Professor Nathaniel Hendren
MIT
nhendren@mit.edu

Professor Jesse Shapiro
Harvard University
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Professor Lawrence Katz
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Job Market Paper

“The Gorilla in the Closet: Regulatory Enforcement Under Federalism” (with Romaine Campbell)

How does federal regulatory capacity affect state enforcement outcomes? In this paper, we provide a model in which a stronger federal regulatory agency can either strengthen or weaken states' negotiating position with their regulated entities. The optimal federal enforcement for the states is one that maximizes state-level negotiated penalties. We apply this in the context of environmental regulation to test whether the EPA's enforcement is too strong or too lenient in two environmental programs. First, using an EPA database of state-issued penalties, we show that when EPA's budget was cut in 2011, state penalties for Clean Air Act violations shrank by 15%. Second, using a dataset with information about environmental remediation projects under California state jurisdiction, we show that firms are more likely to begin cleanup projects during Democratic federal administrations. Our remediation analysis identifies the mechanism: while firm cleanup behavior is affected by EPA strength, cleanups conducted by the state are not, providing evidence that the effects operate through firm-state bargaining. We conclude that over one-third of EPA's effect on environmental penalties is through its spillovers to state outcomes, and that states would benefit from a stronger EPA.

Working Papers

“The Welfare Effects of Eligibility Expansions: Theory and Evidence from SNAP” (with Charlie Rafkin), 2022. Conditionally accepted at *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*.

We study the U.S. rollout of eligibility expansions in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Using administrative data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, we show that expanding eligibility raises enrollment among the inframarginal (always-eligible) population. Using an online experiment and an administrative survey, we find evidence that information frictions, rather than stigma, drive the new take-up. To interpret our findings, we develop a general model of the optimal eligibility threshold for welfare programs with incomplete take-up. Given our empirical results and certain modeling assumptions, the SNAP eligibility threshold is lower than optimal.

Work in Progress “Friendship Formation and the Missing Market” (with Amanda Pallais)

We propose that an inefficiency exacerbates social disconnection. People who want more friends are often advised to join an organization like a sports team, volunteer organization, or church. We argue that lasting social connections are more likely to form when people are introduced through mutual friends, but that difficulty in paying friends to organize get-togethers leads to inefficiently few connections. We first formalize this inefficiency through a simple model. Next, a field experiment shows that incentivizing individuals to connect their friends generates lasting relationships, while similarly introducing unconnected individuals does not. We hosted a four-week trivia competition, where Ph.D. students signed up on teams with friends or as “free agents” assigned to teams with strangers. Due to capacity constraints, only some (randomly-selected) teams were admitted. Four months later, pairs who signed up on the same team but were not friends at baseline were much more likely to be friends (20 pp) and text in the past week (15 pp) if they were admitted to the trivia competition (treatment) than if they were rejected (control). Participants put on teams with strangers did not become friends. Finally, we discuss the ways that organizations can ameliorate this inefficiency—including acting as a financial intermediary, reducing hosts’ organizing costs, and providing financial and non-financial incentives for individuals to bring their friends together—and the challenges inherent in these methods.

“Environmental Contamination and Cancer Incidence”

Communities around state and federal Superfund sites are often concerned about increased risk of cancer from exposure to environmental contamination, but there is little causal evidence on this risk. Using data on public environmental remediation projects, I study how exposures to environmental contaminants relate to cancer incidence. Long disease latency periods mean that comparing outcomes before and after site cleanup is insufficient, so for identification, I borrow insights from the toxicology and epidemiology literatures on the specific diseases associated with each contaminant. I compare outcomes across sites, using only years before remediation begins, where the identifying variation is the specific contaminant involved in each site.

“Welfare Analyses of Firm-Based Government Policies” (with Valerie Chuang, Nathaniel Hendren, and Eric Zwick)

Fellowships & Awards

National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship, 2018-2023

Teaching

Using Big Data to Solve Economic and Social Problems, Harvard University, teaching fellow for Professor Raj Chetty, 2022
Labor Market Analysis, Harvard University, teaching fellow for Professor Lawrence Katz, 2021

Research

Research Assistant, Harvard University, Professor Amanda Pallais, 2016-2018

Academic Service

Referee, *Quarterly Journal of Economics*
Referee, *Journal of Urban Economics*
MOOC creator, Pathways to Research and Doctoral Careers (PREDOC) Consortium
Co-organizer, Harvard Labor/Public Finance Workshop, 2021-2022

Research Grants

Chae Family Economics Research Fund, Harvard, 2022
Mind, Brain, and Behavior, Harvard, 2020
The Lab for Economic Applications and Policy (LEAP), Harvard, 2020
Foundations of Human Behavior, Harvard, 2019
Warburg Foundation, Harvard, 2019