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DOCTORAL STUDIES Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)
PhD, Economics, Expected completion June 2026
DISSERTATION: “Essays in Behavioral and Labor Economics”

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE AND REFERENCES

Professor Frank Schilbach
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Professor Daron Acemoglu
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Professor Parag Pathak
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PRIOR EDUCATION Trinity College, University of Cambridge 2018
B. A. Economics (*double first*)

CITIZENSHIP United Kingdom **GENDER:** Male

FIELDS Primary Fields: Labor Economics
Secondary Fields: Behavioral Economics, Economics of Education

MIT Economics

KARTIK VIRA

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TEACHING EXPERIENCE	Behavioral Economics (graduate, MIT 14.160)	2023
	Teaching Assistant to Professor Frank Schilbach	
	Public Finance and Public Policy (undergraduate, MIT 14.41)	2022
	Teaching Assistant to Professor Jonathan Gruber	
RELEVANT POSITIONS	Research Assistant to Professors Taha Choukhmane and Lawrence Schmidt	2023-25
	Research Assistant to Professor Daron Acemoglu	2021
	Research Assistant to Professor Frank Schilbach	2021
	Predoctoral Fellowship, Harvard University	2018-20
	Research Assistant to Professors John Beshears, James Choi, David Laibson, and Brigitte Madrian	
	Summer Student, Institute for Fiscal Studies	2017
FELLOWSHIPS, HONORS, AND AWARDS	J-PAL European Social Inclusion Initiative Grant	2025
	NBER Global Math Talent Doctoral Fellowship	2023-24
	George and Obie Shultz Fund Grant, MIT	2022-25
	Carl (1976) Shapiro Fellowship, MIT	2020-22
	Senior Scholarship, Trinity College, University of Cambridge	2017
PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES	Conference Presentations	
	Centre for Economic Performance Education Conference	2025
	IZA PhD Workshop in Labor and Behavioral Economics	2025
PUBLICATIONS	“The Rise and Rise of Women’s Employment in the UK,” (with Barra Roantree). IFS Briefing Note BN234, April 2018.	
RESEARCH PAPERS	“Friends in Higher Places: exposure to university attendees and university application decisions” (with Nagisa Tadjfar). (Job Market Paper)	
	Low-income students in the UK are much less likely than equally qualified high-income peers to apply to top universities, limiting social mobility. Using British administrative data and a field experiment at over 20 schools, we show that this gap is partly driven by unequal exposure to past attendees of elite universities. In event-study analyses, applications to a university rise persistently after a student from the same school first attends it; equalising exposure across schools could close 15–30% of the socioeconomic gap in applications. Marginal students induced to attend top universities graduate at typical rates and earn about £4,000 more per year by age 27. Our experiment shows that disadvantaged students systematically underestimate their ability to “fit in” socially at top universities. Randomly assigned exposure to current students at or alumni of university increases intended applications and specifically improves perceptions of social fit, with no effect on perceived admission chances. Together, these results identify lack of exposure and pessimism about social integration - not pessimism about ability or graduation prospects - as key barriers to access, and highlight scalable interventions to reduce persistent inequalities in entry to elite universities and careers.	

“Screening or Exclusion? Reduced standardized testing and university access” (with Nagisa Tadjfar)

The use of screening algorithms such as standardized testing in university admissions remains heavily scrutinized. Using a UK reform that gradually reduced pre-university testing requirements, we examine (i) the extent to which standardized tests are biased against certain students (ii) the returns to higher education for marginal entrants into university. First, we show that standardized tests in our setting exhibit no calibration bias against low-income students, while teacher grades favor them. Second, disadvantaged students are 3-5pp more likely to take academic-track and STEM subjects in high school and 3pp more likely to attend university after the reform. Conditional on test scores, students on the margin of university enrollment have higher variance outcomes: they are more likely to drop out and more likely to graduate in the top fifth of their class. Less than half of these marginal students complete their degrees on time, but they see large private returns. Low-income students shifted into university begin their careers at better firms and gain £70k-£100k in lifetime earnings, net of tuition fees. Our findings suggest that reducing testing barriers expanded educational investment earlier in the pipeline and delivered substantial long-run gains for disadvantaged students.

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

“Unravelling in university admissions: evidence from unconditional university offers in the UK” (with Phi Adajar and Nagisa Tadjfar)

“Heterogeneity in Intertemporal Substitution: Evidence from \$2 Trillion in Retirement Subsidies” (with Taha Choukhmane, Cormac O’Dea, Jonathan Rothbaum, and Lawrence Schmidt)