

OFFICE CONTACT INFORMATION

MIT Department of Economics
77 Massachusetts Avenue, E52-301
Cambridge, MA 02139
kvira@mit.edu
<https://economics.mit.edu/people/phd-students/kartikeya-vira>

MIT PLACEMENT OFFICER

Professor David Autor
dautor@mit.edu
617-253-4669

HOME CONTACT INFORMATION

97 Inman Street
Apt 2
Cambridge, MA 02139
Mobile:
+1 617-800-4821 / +44 7943 982891

MIT PLACEMENT ADMINISTRATOR

Mrs. Shannon Robinson
shmay@mit.edu
617-324-5857

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
MIT Department of Economics
77 Massachusetts Avenue, E52-560
Cambridge, MA 02139
617-253-1000
fschilb@mit.edu

Professor Daron Acemoglu
MIT Department of Economics
77 Massachusetts Avenue, E52-446
Cambridge, MA 02139
617-253-1000
daron@mit.edu

Professor Parag Pathak
MIT Department of Economics
77 Massachusetts Avenue, E52-426
Cambridge, MA 02139
617-253-1000
ppathak@mit.edu

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

SEPTEMBER 2025-- PAGE 2

| | | |
|--|--|---------|
| 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: social fit and university choice” (with Nagisa Tadjfar). (Job Market Paper) | |
| | Elite university access is highly unequal. Low-income students are less likely to apply to and attend than equally qualified high-income peers. Using UK administrative data, we exploit “breakthrough” events when a school first sends a student to a top university. Applications from that school to that university subsequently rise by 30%. Students induced into elite universities by a breakthrough are lower-income, but graduate at typical rates. Access induced by breakthroughs promotes upward mobility: marginal entrants earn £4,000 more annually than matched control students. Why were these students not applying previously? Using a field experiment in British schools, we show that the primary barrier is students' beliefs about social fit at top universities rather than beliefs about admissions chances or success at university. At baseline, low-income students are more pessimistic about their chances of fitting in at an elite university, but not about their chances of admission or graduation. Students randomly assigned to view short videos of undergraduates discussing their experiences are 6 percentage points more likely to apply to the speaker's university. While students’ expectations of fitting in and making friends shift, beliefs about admission chances or graduation do not. Students randomly matched with mentors primarily discuss | |

social life at university, and the most important factor participants raise with mentors is whether they would fit in and enjoy their time. Our findings highlight perceptions of the social environment at elite universities as a central barrier and illustrate how scalable interventions can promote social mobility.

“Prediction or prejudice? Standardized testing and university access” (with Nagisa Tadjfar)

The use of screening algorithms such as standardized testing in university admissions is widely criticized for benefiting wealthy students and not accurately capturing the potential of low-income students. Does standardized testing inhibit opportunity? Our paper answers this question using a staggered elimination of pre-university testing requirements in favor of teacher-assigned grades in the UK. First, we find that low-income students become 3pp more likely to attend university, while enrollment among high-income students is unchanged. However, only 1 in 3 of these marginal students graduates on time. Despite this low graduation rate, students shifted into university see large private returns: they begin their careers at better firms and gain £50k—£100k in lifetime earnings, net of tuition fees. Second, we see upstream shifts beyond the university enrollment margin — affected low-income students are more likely to take academic-track subjects in high school and apply to university. Third, we show that standardized tests in our setting exhibit no calibration bias against low-income students, whereas teacher grades favor them. Taken together, our results indicate that switching from tests to teacher grades can expand opportunity for disadvantaged students even in the absence of calibration bias in tests. Our findings suggest that reducing testing barriers expanded educational investment earlier in the pipeline and delivered substantial long-run gains for marginal entrants.

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)