Name and Github user ID

No more than 2-3 pages

Describe research question

Discuss approach I took and the coding involved

Including discussing any weaknesses or difficulties encountered

Finish with brief discussion of results and how it could be fleshed out in future research

Primary purpose of writeup is inform them of what I’m reading before we look at code

I intend to look at disabled veteran earnings and labor force participation compared to civilian nondisabled cohort earnings and labor force participation by region of the United States. “Disabled” veteran is a wide definition that can include anything as mild as hearing loss or pre-existing conditions prior to joining the military; to as extreme as losing a limb in combat, with associated monthly payments to scale based on a “rating” (percentage disabled) given when exiting the military. Unfortunately, there is a culture in the military of trying to maximize your disability benefits when exiting service (“make sure you say you have sleep apnea, that’s an automatic 20%”) on Facebook groups, Reddit threads, word of mouth, and even specialty consultants or lawyers to help you appeal your rating post hoc. These efforts may result in an equal disability rating through a sum of minor injuries, to that of a serious wound or injury, that truly impacts an individual’s ability to serve in the labor force and thus lifetime earnings. The Department of Veterans Affairs continues to pay out increasing disability compensation as years pass – in FY22, disability payouts totaled $125 billion. The conversation around veteran disability payments, especially when evaluating government accountability and ballooning budgets, mirrors the common conversations around the social safety net – do these “benefits” change willingness to work? Does a rating change a person’s perceptions of their prospects, and their intrinsic motivation? Disability benefits have another layer of analysis beyond the social safety net, as they are not means tested, and if a conversation ever burgeons regarding means testing there is a vicious outcry. They are also benefits for life.

My hypothesis is generally that lower disability ratings translate to comparable earnings and LFP to nondisabled counterparts in similar areas, if not greater; while high disability ratings would then affect ability to work and earn all else being equal, so earnings may be comparable but LFP will be much lower. Regionally, I hypothesize there will be significant differences in earnings and LFP in the American South, and will be interested to see other differences. Earnings will be interesting to evaluate due to the scale of monetary benefits available as disability ratings increase, and academics have looked at whether this compensation “makes up” for the loss of earnings due to true disability and impacted employment prospects. However, the difficult thing to pull out is who is truly disabled and unable to work; versus who is not incentivized to work but could, because of their high ratings or higher ratings then they should have been evaluated for. I plan to use IPUMS CPS data to look at veteran earnings and LFP, from 2011 to 2015 (five years’ worth of data) and compare to cohort non-veteran earnings and LFP. I then plan to use the annual IPUMS Veterans Supplement, again for 2011 to 2015, to expand the analysis to then look at these cohorts when now including different levels of their service-connected disability status (low to medium to high), corresponding compensation for the disability, and the resulting effect of the disability on the person's labor force status, and participation in veterans' programs. For a third dataset I intend to look at this data by state, or pull data from data.gov to add some sort of state-based analysis – there is a component to this discussion where some states or areas of the United States contribute disproportionately more servicemembers on average, so it would be interesting to see a by-state/region breakdown.