

OFFICE CONTACT INFORMATION

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

MIT PLACEMENT OFFICER

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

HOME CONTACT INFORMATION

500 Memorial Drive
 Cambridge, MA 02139
 Mobile: 617-608-8838

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 on Inequality"

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE AND REFERENCES

Professor Jonathan Gruber
 MIT Department of Economics
 77 Massachusetts Avenue, E52-318
 Cambridge, MA 02139
 617-253-8892
gruberj@mit.edu

Professor David Autor
 MIT Department of Economics
 77 Massachusetts Avenue, E52-438
 Cambridge, MA 02139
 617-253-4669
dautor@mit.edu

Professor Frank Schilbach
 MIT Department of Economics
 77 Massachusetts Avenue, E52-560
 Cambridge, MA 02139
 617-253-9299
fschilb@mit.edu

Professor Nathan Hendren
 MIT Department of Economics
 77 Massachusetts Avenue, E52-434
 Cambridge, MA 02139
 773-344-8990
nhendren@mit.edu

PRIOR EDUCATION Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) 2017
 SB Physics and SB Materials Science and Engineering

CITIZENSHIP USA **GENDER:** Female

FIELDS Primary Field: Labor
 Secondary Fields: Public Economics, Education

TEACHING EXPERIENCE PhD Labor Economics II (14.662), MIT 2026
 TA to Professors David Autor and Nina Roussille

MIT Economics

NAGISA TADJFAR

OCTOBER 2025-- PAGE 2

	Microeconomic Theory and Public Policy (14.03), MIT TA to Professor David Autor	2024, 2025
	Data Interpretation (ECON 21300), University of Chicago TA to Professor Steven Levitt	2019
	Solid-State Chemistry (3.091), MIT TA to Professors Niels Holten-Andersen and Robert Macfarlane	2016
RELEVANT POSITIONS	RA to Professor Amy Finkelstein RA to Professors Kerwin K. Charles and Erik Hurst RA to Professor Steven Levitt Investment Banking Analyst, Goldman Sachs	2020-21 2019-20 2018-19 2017-18
FELLOWSHIPS, HONORS, AND AWARDS	Horowitz Foundation for Social Policy Grant AIBM Student Research Fellowship JPAL European Social Inclusion Initiative Grant (\$26,000) NAEd / Spencer Dissertation Fellowship, <i>semi-finalist</i> Jerry A. Hausman Graduate Dissertation Fellowship George and Obie Shultz Fund Global Priorities Fellowship National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship Department of Economics Fellowship Phi Beta Kappa	2025 2025-26 2025 2025 2023-24 2021-25 2020 2020 2020 2017
PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES	Referee: Industrial and Labor Relations Review (ILR Review) Conference Presentations: CEP Education Conference at LSE, Yale North East Universities Gender Day (co-author), IZA PhD Workshop in Labor and Behavioral Economics (co-author) Service: Graduate Resident Advisor at MIT Next House, MIT Committee of Undergraduate Admissions and Financial Aid, MIT Labor Lunch Organizer, President of Graduate Economic Association, MIT-Harvard Application Assistance and Mentorship Program	
RESEARCH PAPERS	“Prediction or prejudice? Standardized testing and university access” <i>Job Market Paper</i> (with Kartik Vira) 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.

“Friends in higher places: Social fit and university choice”

(with Kartik Vira)

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.

“Firms Believing Women Get Less Means They Do”

(with Nancy Wang)

This paper examines an employer-driven mechanism behind the early-career gender earnings gap using novel data on MIT graduates' job offers and negotiation process. We document three key findings. First, women receive lower initial compensation offers than men within an employer-occupation. Second, this gap is entirely concentrated in non-salary components—signing bonus and equity—with no gap in base salary. Third, we find no gender differences in job search, and women negotiate as frequently and successfully as men. These findings also generalize to a national sample of high-skill workers in a dataset from Levels.fyi. To understand these patterns, we develop a model showing that a small number of discriminatory firms leads all firms in the market to lowball women in equilibrium. This market-wide gender gap is sustained through outside offers and cannot be closed by changes in worker behavior. We validate this mechanism using an incentivized resume evaluation experiment with recruiters, where we find that firms expect other firms to offer women less. Our results highlight the role of firm behavior—rather than worker decisions alone—in perpetuating gender pay disparities.

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

“Confidence in Ability and Job Search” (with Maxim Massenkoff and Nancy Wang)

Inexperienced workers may have incorrect beliefs or diffuse priors on their abilities relative to the broader labor market, which may lead to overly restricted job search. Can a credible ability signal to high-skill workers augment job search behavior and improve worker allocation across firms? We partner with a large online interviewing platform that screens workers for employers in the tech sector and identifies exceptional users as “one of the best-performing coders on the platform,” communicates this fact to the worker, and subsequently offers them access to interview with select firms. Using a fuzzy regression discontinuity (RD) design around the exogenous performance threshold used to identify these users, we find evidence of increased and more ambitious job search as a result of the signal. Workers just above the threshold are 20pp more likely to switch jobs within a year, with effects concentrated among workers with less than 5 years of experience. Workers from lower-ranked universities who did not previously work at an elite firm see improved labor market outcomes 2-5 years after first using the platform—these workers are 21pp more likely to work at an elite tech firm and work at companies with 12% higher expected compensation. We find that more than 85% of job switches occur off-platform, suggesting that access to interviews on the platform did not mediate these effects. Instead, our findings are consistent with increased and more ambitious worker search after receiving a credible signal about their ability, particularly among groups that were previously less likely to have considered these opportunities. Our next steps include generating measures of worker self-confidence from self-assessment and video recordings of interviews and characterizing worker-firm match quality.

“On One Condition: The Welfare Effects of Unraveling in the UK College Admissions System”

(with Phi Adajar and Kartik Vira)

The mid-2010s saw a rapid proliferation of offers to UK universities in which students were admitted regardless of their end-of-school test results, effectively shifting risk from students to universities. In this paper, we seek to understand the nature of this unraveling, with a focus towards universities' incentives and the effects on students' short- and long-term welfare using data from all UK college applications from 2012 to 2021. We find that these "unconditional offers" were given by lower-ranked universities and targeted towards higher-achieving students. Students with an unconditional offer are 4.5pp less likely to attend their top offer. This is consistent with students being shifted into lower-ranking universities and becoming "undermatched". Simultaneously, college attendance increases; students with an unconditional offer are 12.4pp more likely to be matched to a college when compared to students with similar test scores and teacher evaluations. On the university side, these unconditional offers improve university yields and student composition, and correlational evidence shows that a university's adoption of unconditional offers occurs in response to its competitors doing the same. We estimate a structural model of university offers to evaluate the nature of this competitive response and the implications for student welfare.

PUBLICATIONS

"Trade Competition and the Decline in Union Organizing: Evidence from Certification Elections" *Journal of Labor Economics*, *forthcoming*.
(with Kerwin K. Charles and Matthew S. Johnson)