

Research Statement and Agenda

Gabriel Olivier

Tulane University

My research fields are Labor Economics, Economics of Education, Political Economy, and Applied Microeconomics. Broadly, I study the causal impacts of U.S. policy on educational outcomes, both for policies intended to affect education and policies with unintended spillovers into education. In ongoing work, I study the impact of a higher foregone wage on human capital formation; the effects of recent expansions of universal school voucher programs on private school enrollment and pricing; and the effects of racial and language discrimination in education.

I. Foregone Wage and Human Capital Formation

In my job market paper, “**Minimum Wage Policy and Human Capital Formation: College Enrollment and Major Choice**,” I investigate how an increased minimum wage affects college enrollment and the majors students choose. While the foregone wage of human capital formation is widely discussed in the labor economics literature, effects on educational attainment are seldom mentioned in national discussions of minimum wage policy.

I study the period 2004-2013, which includes the largest increase in the federal minimum wage in U.S. history. Most prior studies estimate the impact of the minimum wage on college enrollment using changes in state-level minimum wage policy alone, which tend to be small increases that may not be large enough to induce substantial changes in college-going behavior. My research overcomes this obstacle by leveraging some of the largest changes in effective state minimum wages in history and expands the literature by not only examining effects on enrollment but also on the majors students choose. To explore these effects, I use individual-level data for recent high school graduates from the American Community Survey (ACS) and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). I use two novel identification strategies to overcome the empirical challenge that the effective minimum wage increased in all states between 2004 and 2013. The first leverages variation in the timing of each state's increase in a staggered difference-in-differences framework, and the second leverages variation in the magnitude of each state's increase in a dosage difference-in-differences framework.

These empirical strategies produce qualitatively similar estimates of the impact of minimum wage increases on college outcomes using different datasets and sources of identifying variation. I find evidence of initial increases in college enrollment, likely driven by

employed students earning more income, but also of an increase in dropout rates due to the allure of a now-higher-paying outside option. The dropout effect dominates overall, resulting in a 7.5% net decrease in college enrollment. This is accompanied by changes in college major choice away from lower-paying majors (psychology, education, and business) and towards higher-paying majors (STEM, health, engineering, and biology). My findings suggest that minimum wage policy can alter both the level and type of human capital accumulated by recent high school graduates.

II. Universal School Vouchers

In “**The Effects of Universal School Vouchers on Private School Tuition and Enrollment: A National Analysis**” with Douglas N. Harris, we study the effects of universal school vouchers on the private school market, focusing on enrollment and tuition pricing. To do this, we scraped over 100,000 webpages from Private School Review to construct a new and unique dataset of private school enrollment and tuition. Our study represents the only national investigation of universal school vouchers, and we find limited short-term increases in enrollment (3-4%) and tuition (5-10%). We also develop a theoretical model that predicts these effects will likely grow over time.

In a related working paper using the same dataset, “**Universal School Vouchers and Market Dynamics: The Effect of Recent Reforms in the U.S.**,” Douglas N. Harris, Matías Morales, and I explore the effects of universal school vouchers on private school entry and exit, where we find a 4 percentage point increase in the entry rate of private schools.

III. Discrimination in Education

In two other working papers, “**Desegregation Busing and the Market for Private Schools**” and “**Forced Migration, Xenophobia, and Educational Attainment: The Acadian Diaspora and the 1921 Louisiana Ban on Cajun French in Public Schools**,” I examine how institutionalized discrimination affects educational outcomes. In the former, I estimate how the intensity of integration busing affected private school supply and demand using a novel source of identifying variation: whether a city was graded for investment risk by the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation in the 1930s, which has been shown to increase residential segregation through the 1950s to today. In the latter, I investigate the impact of language bans on educational attainment in Louisiana using previously unexplored genealogical data that track Acadians over time.

IV. Future Research

Looking forward, I plan to continue investigating how human capital formation decisions respond to incentives and to examine the effects of policies addressing educational discrimination. I have also positioned myself to be one of the leading scholars on the effects

of universal school vouchers, with my work already featured in prominent news outlets such as *The New York Times*. This is a promising avenue for my future research as universal school vouchers continue to expand nationwide. The Private School Review data I collected includes fields beyond enrollment and tuition, allowing me to investigate additional impacts of universal school vouchers on the private school market. Specifically, I am interested in studying the recent expansion of microschools and how private school admissions policies affect racial segregation in both public and private education.