

RESEARCH STATEMENT

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Motivation

My motivation to conduct research is driven by an interest to use data and the insights data can generate to improve human well-being. This has led to an interest in a wide range of policies including in the areas of Education Economics, Labor Economics, Conflict Economics, and International Trade.

Ongoing Projects

Is There a Graduation Penalty to Starting in a Community College in Kansas?

Co-authored with Donna Ginther and Patricia Oslund. This paper uses an innovative new instrumental variables technique to estimate whether students who wish to obtain a baccalaureate degree but begin at a community college in the state of Kansas face a penalty (accumulate fewer credit hours and graduate at lower rates) compared to their peers who begin at a four-year institution. The study demonstrates that the classic direct distance instrument does not meet the exclusion restriction in the state of Kansas and introduces an innovative instrument that has not yet been used in the education literature: the difference-in-distance instrument. The study shows that this instrument does meet the relevance requirement and the exclusion restriction. Further, this instrument shows that, at odds with the literature on the community college penalty, accounting for selection, community college students in Kansas do not face a penalty compared to their four-year institution peers.

Impact of Women Legislators on State Welfare Outcomes

This study examines the impact of additional women legislators in state legislatures on three major state welfare outcomes: the state unemployment rate, the number of state TANF recipients, and the number of state SNAP recipients. Using a regression discontinuity design, the paper exploits close elections to identify the causal effect of an additional woman legislature on these outcomes. Briefly, the findings suggest that additional women legislatures reduce unemployment and thus induce a corresponding reduction in TANF and SNAP enrollments. The study seeks to demonstrate a possible mechanism to explain these findings and explores whether women legislators may have an impact on the composition of state budgets, reducing budgetary outlays to areas with low employment elasticities and increasing budgetary outlays to areas with high employment elasticities.

Determinants of Pakistani Trade Policy: “Protection for Sale” and the Impact on Exports

The third chapter is a study of the determinants of Pakistani trade policy. The main research question asks whether politically connected manufacturing sectors in Pakistan receive greater trade protection than manufacturing sectors that are not politically connected. This paper first explores descriptive analysis to understand whether political connection, proxied for with the existence of trade associations, has any explanatory power over the implementation of trade policy, particularly the use of Non-Tariff Measures (NTMs). The study expands on this descriptive analysis by looking at a classic model in the trade literature, the Grossman Helpman Model. The study demonstrates that the Grossman Helpman model does not explain equilibrium trade outcomes for traditional trade protection (tariffs), but does explain equilibrium outcomes for total protection (tariffs, non-tariff measures, and regulatory duties).

Methods

The methods I employ range the gamut of applied microeconometrics. My research has used instrumental variable analysis, proposing a new instrument in the estimation of the community college penalty. It has also used an innovative regression discontinuity design proposing a double-index approach by “aggregating up” the location of the initial index to the unit of analysis. This was done looking at close elections in opposite-sex elections where the running variable (vote share) first determines the exogenous assignment of a woman legislator to a state legislature. The unit of analysis is at the state level so this another running variable is introduced (net number of women legislators winning close elections). This is the first paper to introduce an “aggregating up” regression discontinuity approach.

In Summary

In completing the dissertation fulfilling partial requirement for the PhD at KU, I have come to love the process of research. My advisor helped me see the wonder of asking questions in applied microeconomics. This has led to many opportunities to apply and share knowledge of the various methods useful to asking applied econometric questions. I hope to continue to share my passion for applied econometric research and to continue pursuing interesting research questions that analyze the impact of various policies in Education, Labor, Trade, and Conflict Economics.