

Where people work and live are two central drivers of economic outcomes and well-being. As a result, a central economic question is understanding what determines labor market and spatial outcomes. My research as a labor economist uses large-scale experiments and novel data collection to study how policy, technological, and social change affect the distribution of economic outcomes across workers, firms, and places. The core research questions that I have contributed to are: (1) How do labor market policies and institutions influence workers and firms, (2) How does economic and policy change influence spatial inequality, and (3) How does income affect household behavior and outcomes.

### **How do labor market policies and institutions influence workers and firms?**

Information frictions are a challenge for workers, firms, and policymakers. As a result, policymakers often implement policies aimed at ameliorating problems created by imperfect information. One possibility is that types of information are disadvantageous to some individuals, leading to proposals to limit the usage of such information. In Bartik and Nelson (2025), in the *Review of Economics and Statistics*, we study policies banning credit checks by firms during hiring. We show that these bans hurt job-finding outcomes and match quality for Black job-seekers because non-credit report signals are less informative for Black job-seekers relative to White job seekers. In a recent working paper with Bryan Stuart and Seth Chizeck, we investigate whether actively providing information to labor market participants can improve outcomes. Collaborating with the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, we created a job search tool to help job-seekers learn about good occupational transitions for them and then randomly provided access to this tool to some job-seekers. The tool substantially increases the intensity and quality of job-search but did not affect final employment or earnings.

The public sector itself faces tradeoffs in how much information to use when making decision. For example, the government can often choose between delegating the implementation of a policy to private actors or directly implementing the policy. Delegating the policy can often lead to faster administration of a program, while direct implementation can allow for better targeting. In Bartik, Cullen, Glaeser, Luca, Stanton, and Sunderam (Forthcoming), in the *Review of Economics and Statistics*, we study this tradeoff in the context of the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and find that in the case of PPP delegation was optimal because the cost of delay was high and treatment effect heterogeneity was low. These three papers provide a nuanced picture of whether information can improve labor market outcomes.

My work on PPP was also part of a broader series of papers that I wrote to understand the labor market during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Bartik, Bertrand, Cullen, Glaeser, Luca, and Stanton (2020) in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* we implemented a novel survey of small businesses at the start of the COVID-19 crisis. This survey asked firms about their current outcomes and expectations about the COVID crisis and performed several survey experiments on how different policy regimes would affect behavior. In Bartik, Bertrand, Lin, Rothstein, and Unrath (2020), in the *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, we link high-frequency data on worker hours from time-card data with surveys of worker expectations to understand how the labor market was evolving in response to the pandemic and the resulting policy responses. Finally, in Bartik, Cullen, Glaeser, Luca, and Stanton (2025), in the *Journal of Economics and Management Strategy*, we conducted a series of surveys of firms and workers to understand how the adoption and productivity of remote work evolved after the pandemic.

Apprenticeships are an important, but understudied, labor market institution that control entry into many skilled trades. Historically apprenticeship programs have underrepresented racial minorities. I've long thought that labor economics could benefit from focused exploration

of how labor markets function within particular occupations, such as the apprenticeships and the skilled trades. In a working paper with Bertrand and Stuart (2026), we explore demand and supply explanations for this underrepresentation using a combination of novel administrative data, an audit study of apprenticeships, and a survey of potential apprentices.

### **How does economic and policy change influence spatial inequality?**

Real incomes, employment, health and well-being, and other important outcomes all vary significantly across space. My research studies how changes in technology, the social environment, and regulations influence this spatial inequality. In Bartik, Currie, Greenstone, and Knittel (2019) in *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* we study the development of a new technology, hydraulic fracturing, affected exposed communities. We estimate the effects of fracking on local economic outcomes and amenities and interpret them in a spatial equilibrium model. We find that fracking improved welfare for the average resident, although the benefits were reduced by local disamenities created by fracking.

Racial segregation has historically been an important aspect of spatial inequality in the US. Black households were concentrated in low-income neighborhoods in the central cities of large metropolitan areas. In my paper with Evan Mast in *The Review of Economics and Statistics* (Forthcoming) we show that this pattern has changed by the large suburbanization of Black households and explore the causes and consequences of this change. This suburbanization has led to a divergence in neighborhood outcomes among Black households, with outcomes improving for those in the suburbs and worsening for those remaining in central cities. These patterns are driven by rising relative amenities and declining relative house prices in suburbs.

Spatial inequality is also influenced by local government policy. Arguably the most important policy lever that local governments control are zoning regulations. In recent work, Arpit Gupta, Dan Milo (2025), and I take advantage of advances in large language models to measure zoning regulations. In our first paper, we introduce our pipeline for measuring regulations at scale and show that housing regulations cluster into two components, with one reflecting attempts of municipalities to capture value in high demand environments and another reflecting municipalities engaging in exclusionary zoning to attract high-income residents.

### **How does income affect individual and household behavior and outcomes?**

Income is strongly correlated with many economic and social outcomes. These relationships play a key role in labor economics, household finance, health economics, and macroeconomics. However, despite the centrality of income effects to so many literatures, there is still uncertainty about the magnitude of these elasticities due to the paucity of plausibly exogenous variation in income. To provide new evidence on these questions, my co-Principal Investigators and I conducted the Open Research Unconditional income Study (ORUS), an experiment that randomized 1000 people to receive \$1000 a month unconditionally for three years, 2000 people to receive \$50 a month for three years. We coupled this randomization with an unprecedented data collection effort, including baseline, midline, and endline human enumerated surveys, monthly online surveys, time and nutrition diaries, administrative linkages to wage and employment, credit, schooling, and bank records, and biomarker data.

In Vivalt, Rhodes, Bartik, Broockman, Krause, and Miller (2025), accepted at the *Quarterly Journal of Economics* we estimate the short-term effects of this cash transfer on employment, earnings, and labor market outcomes more broadly. We find substantial negative labor supply effects and estimate tight zeros on measures of job quality, ruling out that the cash transfers facilitate search for higher quality jobs. We also estimate no effect on schooling attainment. In another working paper, Bartik, Rhodes, Broockman, Krause, Miller, and Vivalt (2025), we find

that individuals spend a large share of the cash transfers nearly immediately and only modestly increases savings. Instead of increasing job quality, investments in schooling, or savings, the transfers could have improved participants health either through reduced stress, healthier behavior, or greater access to medical care. In Miller, Rhodes, Bartik, Broockman, Krause, and Vivalt (2026), conditionally accepted in the *American Economic Review*, we investigate this possibility. We find no evidence for sustained improvements in self-reported or clinical measures of mental or physical health.

The evidence above suggests that transfer recipients used the transfer to increase leisure and consumption in the short-run and did not have a substantial effect on investments or other long-term inputs to well-being. The transfer could have instead facilitated investments in the participants' children. In our working paper Krause, Rhodes, Miller, Bartik, Broockman, and Vivalt (2026), we investigate how the transfer affected parents and children. We find no evidence for improvement in children's short-term outcomes. In other working papers, we investigate the effect of the transfer on political preferences and behavior (Broockman, Rhodes, Bartik, Krause, Miller, and Vivalt (2025)), and intrahousehold outcomes (Rhodes, Broockman, Vivalt, Krause, Miller, and Bartik (2026)).

Along with this same research team, I collaborated with the City of Chicago and Cook County to randomize unconditional cash transfer pilots within Chicago and Cook County respectively. These pilots studied smaller transfer than ORUS, but have a much larger sample size, allowing us to explore treatment effect heterogeneity and better understand the mechanisms driving the treatment effects. In addition to these studies, there has been a burgeoning number of unconditional cash transfer experiments in the US and other high-income countries. Along with Andrew Goodman-Bacon, Elizabeth Rhodes, Eva Vivalt, and Sarah Miller, I've been working on a meta-analysis and analytic literature review of these experiments. We have received a revise and resubmit from the *Journal of Economic Literature*.

### **Future Research**

My future agenda aims to build upon this research to better understand the drivers of individual and government behavior to inform policy decisions reflecting the complexity of the real world. One striking pattern we see in our work on cash transfers is that low-income households do surprisingly little investment of any type in response to a large change in unearned income. In one of our pilots, we found suggestive evidence that combining a large income shock with financial counseling may have shifted this behavior substantially. In future work, I aim to build upon this and understand how the effects of income shocks are influenced by counseling, payment structure, and other details. Our job-search experiment found that information shifts job search behavior but not final labor market outcomes. One hypothesis that was generated by follow-up surveys from the experiment was that this reflected a "last-mile problem" in translating better information into better labor market outcomes due to challenges in understanding the idiosyncrasies of how to apply for and get a job in a new field. We are designing experiments that attempt to remedy this last-mile problem to test this hypothesis.

Finally, our work on zoning has generated a novel picture of housing regulations and approach to summarizing them. In follow-up work, we are building a partially automated historical zoning code collection process to build a panel of zoning regulations over the past century to estimate the causal effects of zoning regulations and understand their evolution over time. This data and analysis will allow the development of richer models of housing development incorporate complementarity or substitutability between regulations, the cost and time-patterns of land assembly, demand effects through local amenities, and option value.