JENNA ANDERS

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Academic Positions

Assistant Professor of Public Policy and Economics, 2025-
University of Virginia, Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy

S.V. Ciriacy-Wantrup Postdoctoral Fellow, 2024-2025
University of California-Berkeley, Agricultural and Resource Economics

Education

Harvard University
Ph.D. Economics, 2018 to 2024
Harvard Environmental Economics Program Pre-Doctoral Fellow

Brown University
B.A. Economics (honors), Environmental Studies, 2016

Fields

Primary: Public Economics, Environmental Economics
Secondary: Labor Economics

Publications

Anders, J., & Rafkin, C. (2026). The Welfare Effects of Eligibility Expansions: Theory and Evidence from SNAP. American Economic Journal: Economic Policy, 18(3), 61–100. **https://doi.org/10.1257/pol.20220738**

We study the U.S. rollout of eligibility expansions in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Using administrative data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, we show that expanding eligibility raises enrollment among the inframarginal (always-eligible) population. Using an online experiment and an administrative survey, we find evidence that information frictions, rather than stigma, drive the new take-up. To interpret our findings, we develop a general model of the optimal eligibility threshold for welfare programs with incomplete take-up. Given our empirical results and certain modeling assumptions, the SNAP eligibility threshold is lower than optimal.

Working Papers

"**Central Authority in Local Regulation: A Sufficient Statistic for Welfare and an Application to Environmental Enforcement**" (with Romaine Campbell)

Federal and state agencies often enforce the same regulations, raising a central question: Are state and federal enforcement complements or substitutes? We show empirically that a stronger federal agency increases state penalties for environmental violations and use a bargaining model to derive a sufficient statistics test that signs the welfare effect of this change. In Clean Air Act enforcement, state-issued penalties fell after 2011 federal budget cuts, with 24% larger reductions among facilities with high ex ante exposure to federal enforcement. In a state superfund program, firm-led cleanups overseen by the state were slower under Republican presidential administrations, when federal enforcement is more lenient, but state-led cleanups were not. The results imply that over one-third of the federal Environmental Protection Agency's total effect on enforcement is through spillovers to states. The sufficient statistics test suggests that stronger federal enforcement power would increase states' welfare in this context.

"**Social Disconnection and the Missing Market**" (with Amanda Pallais)

Social disconnection has increased over the last 25 years, while traditional contexts for forming connections, like churches and in-person workplaces, have weakened. Through a field experiment, we

show the effectiveness of an alternative approach to connection formation: mutual friend intermediaries. We hosted a four-week trivia competition where participants could either join friend-organized teams or register to be matched onto teams with strangers. We then randomized which teams could participate. When teams were organized by existing friends, teammates who weren't initially friends were 20 pp more likely to be friends and 15 pp to be in text communication four months later due to participating, while participating reduced contemporaneous loneliness by 11 pp (24%). In contrast, the intervention did not generate lasting relationships for pairs matched onto teams by the competition. Yet, we propose mutual friends make inefficiently few introductions due to a market failure: it is difficult to compensate friends for organizing costs. Consistent with inefficient underprovision, survey evidence finds substantial untapped supply of friend introductions – 72% of people say they could connect friends, while only 5% recently have – alongside strong demand for such introductions. Finally, we discuss examples of organizations that encourage people to bring their networks together at scale, showing how the organizations best positioned to scale this approach may not be those typically associated with community building

Work in Progress

"Welfare Analyses of Firm-Based Government Policies" (with Valerie Chuang, Nathaniel Hendren, and Eric Zwick)

"Superfund Sites and Cancer Incidence" (with Graeme Peterson and Rachel Young)

Fellowships & Awards

National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship, 2018-2023

Teaching

Using Big Data to Solve Economic and Social Problems, Harvard University, teaching fellow for Professor Raj Chetty, 2022
Labor Market Analysis, Harvard University, teaching fellow for Professor Lawrence Katz, 2021

Academic Service

Referee, *Journal of Public Economics, Quarterly Journal of Economics, Journal of Urban Economics, Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, Journal of Environmental Economics and Management, Journal of the Association of Environmental and Resource Economists*
MOOC creator, Pathways to Research and Doctoral Careers (PREDOC) Consortium
Co-organizer, Harvard Labor/Public Finance Workshop, 2021-2022

Research Grants

Chae Family Economics Research Fund, Harvard, 2022
Mind, Brain, and Behavior, Harvard, 2020
The Lab for Economic Applications and Policy (LEAP), Harvard, 2020
Foundations of Human Behavior, Harvard, 2019
Warburg Foundation, Harvard, 2019