MICHELLE RAO

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EDUCATION

London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE)

PhD in Economics   2025 (expected)

  Advisors: Oriana Bandiera, Robin Burgess, Gharad Bryan, Rachael Meager

  Primary field: Development Economics

MRes in Economics (Distinction)   2018-2020

BSc in Economics (First Class)   2012-2015

Oxford University

MSc in Economics for Development (Distinction)   2015-2016

JOB MARKET PAPER

Program Evaluations and Policy Spending

Despite the rise of program evaluation, there is limited rigorous evidence on the relationship between causal estimates of impact and policy spending. This paper examines the systematic relationship between program evaluations and policy spending, in the context of Conditional Cash Transfers in Latin America and the Caribbean. Using a novel dataset of 128 program evaluations mapped to spending, I consider patterns of policy spending consistent with responses to individual evaluations, and to cumulative bodies of evidence. I find a robust zero association between individual program evaluations and policy spending. More statistically significant, larger magnitude, or more surprising results do not correspond with larger changes in spending. Moreover, stronger cumulative evidence on impact, estimated using a Bayesian hierarchical model, does not correspond with higher policy spending. As these evaluations are often directly or indirectly facilitated by policymakers, this result seems unlikely to be driven by lack of policy relevance, and instead suggests the presence of either inefficiencies or constraints. To make sense of the average zero relationship, I explore patterns of policy spending for subsets of evidence that are more credible, actionable, or generalizable. I find that when evaluations are time-actionable and political constraints are low, there is a positive association between causal estimates of impact and spending. This suggests that the timeliness of publication is an overlooked channel in the evidence to policy pipeline.

PUBLICATIONS

Men are from Mars, and Women Too: A Bayesian Meta-analysis of Overconfidence Experiments, with Oriana Bandiera, Nidhi Parekh & Barbara Pentrongolo, Economica, 2022

WORKING PAPERS

Women and Cash Transfers: How program design and local conditions relate to causal estimates of impact, with Gabriela Diaz-Pardo

Gender differences in Altruism: A Bayesian Hierarchical Analysis of Dictator games

WORKS IN PROGRESS

Targeting Barriers to Gender Evidence Use, with Michael O'Sullivan and Léa Rouanet

Peer learning and Productivity Across NGOs: Evidence from a cross-country experiment, with Jack Thiemel

EMPLOYMENT

Consultant in Research Uptake team, World Bank Africa Gender Innovation Lab	2020-
Economic Consultant, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs	2020
Economics Analyst, Ernst & Young	2016-2018

TEACHING

Quantitative Methods for Public Policy, LSE, TA for Mark Schankermann	2023-2024
Microeconomic Principles, LSE, TA for Dimitra Petropoulou	2022-2023
Development Economics, LSE, TA for Oriana Bandiera & Robin Burgess	2020-2021
Microeconomic Principles, LSE, TA for Dimitra Petropoulou & Timothy Besley	2019-2020

AWARDS AND DISTINCTIONS

Excellence in Education Awards, LSE	2024
Teaching Bonus, based on student evaluations, LSE	2019-2024
Class Teacher Award, highly commended, LSE	2021
Luca D'Agliano Prize for Best Extended Essay, Oxford	2016

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

Referee service. Economic Journal, Economica, Journal of Economic Behavior and Organisation

Presentations. 2024 (incl. scheduled*): Y-RISE*, OXDEV, Doctorissimes Paris School of Economics, Oxford Policy Engagement Network

LANGUAGES

English (native), Mandarin (native), French (intermediate)