

Interview with Professor Caitlin Myers (she/her/hers) - November 30th, 2023



Would you mind just saying your name, pronouns and position at Middlebury?

Sure. So my name is Caitlin Knowles Myers. My formal position is the John G. McCullough, Professor of Economics. And I also direct the Middlebury Initiative for Data and Digital Methods, which is called MiddData [insert explanation]. And my pronouns are she/her.

How long have you been a professor at Middlebury?

I came to Middlebury in 2005. So, I need to stop counting because it makes me feel old.

What kind of courses do you teach here?

I've taught a lot of courses here. But I mostly teach courses that specialize in empirical methods and economics. So I've taught our statistics class or regression analysis class, and an upper level class on causal inference. I've also taught data science across disciplines. I supervise senior thesis workshops. And once, and I hope I'll get to do it again, I taught a first year seminar on unplanned pregnancy, in partnership with Planned Parenthood of Northern New England.

When did you start studying abortion access in your research?

It's hard to pinpoint this, I'm gonna go all the way back to when I was in grad school. So I was in grad school from 2000 to 2005. I went to the University of Texas at Austin and I trained as a labor economist with secondary fields in urban economics and econometrics, which is the set of statistical tools that economists use to study cause and effect. And I was really interested in gender and racial differentials in labor markets, and how you can use statistics to disentangle the various factors that contribute to them, right, just because you see women earning less on average than men does not necessarily mean the explanation is it's labor market discrimination. So how do you figure out how to isolate and measure the relative contributing factors to that differential? So I was really interested in that, and my advisor, who's wonderful and is continuing to support me through my entire career, gave me— it's gonna sound like harsh advice, but I understand exactly where he was coming from. He said, “you should be careful not to be a woman studying women things,” – that that would hurt me, he was saying, in this field. And I decided, partly because I was young and I wanted a job, and I listened to the advice of various people who are giving me guidance. And partly, it was easy to listen to that advice because I had so many other things I was interested in, I really shifted at the time to studying racial differentials in labor market outcomes. And when I got to Middlebury, I realized very early on that I had come to a place where I could take risks. And I also realized, frankly, that life is too short not to spend your time on the things that you're really passionate about. So I shifted fairly quickly to a research project on the effects of abortion legalization in the late 60s and early 70s. And that was around 2007, that I started that work. So gosh, it's like fifteen years ago now. Right? And I was working on that question, because there's this really interesting literature on the effects of the contraceptive pill on women's labor force outcomes. And I had taken that literature at face value and assumed that everything there was replicable and correct, but I began working on a project using labor market data from the time and I just couldn't see the evidence for the pill's powers that I thought was supposed to be there. And at the same time, I could see very easily in the data, that as abortion became legal in some states, there are these dramatic demographic shifts. And so I decided that I would really dig in and it involved years of work like that paper that resulted from this project took ten years to write, which is a little absurd. I dug into the legal environment, I read a lot of annotated statutes and judicial rulings from the 1950s, all the way through the 80s to basically understand the legal environment and each US state that was

governing young women's access to abortion and contraception. I have a whole separate paper, like on that, which is a little bit odd for the economist, like there's no statistics whatsoever. It's just what I think about all these statutes and like a state by state categorization. And then I used those data to implement a model that isolated and measured the effects of the dissemination of the contraceptive pill and the legalization of abortion, and showed that while I couldn't find evidence of the effects of the pill on young women's fertility and marriage, there were huge effects of the legalization of abortion and that it actually reduced the probability that somebody would become a teen mom, by about a third. It reduced the probability of a teen marriage by about a fifth. And the marriage effect was completely driven by an eighty percent reduction and what were then called "shotgun marriages," meaning marriages that were kind of forced upon a young couple as a result of an unintended pregnancy. That paper hit really well in the economics literature. It was published in a top journal, which is really cool and really exciting. And also, it just opened up this entire research agenda for me, because I was like, if abortion mattered that much for my mother's generation, then what are the effects of abortion policy today? And so that was really the start of this work.

Can you kind of describe some of your more current research and scholarship?

Sure. So I would say there's kind of two phases of my research and scholarship since then. So the first phase was measuring the effects of abortion restrictions in the pre-Dobbs [*Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* - The 2022 US Supreme Court decision that overturned *Roe v. Wade*] era. So, just to give you kind of a quick overview, *Roe v. Wade*, in 1973, was the landmark Supreme Court decision that established a constitutional right to abortion. And under that ruling, it was very difficult for states to enforce restrictions on abortion, but many states wanted to and so they were legislating restrictions, things like parental involvement laws, or mandatory waiting periods, or spousal consent laws. And so, there was a lot of confusion and a lot of efforts to figure out what the kind of boundaries of that ruling were. A set of statutes from one state, Pennsylvania, eventually made it back to the Supreme Court in a second landmark decision called *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, that was a decision in the early 90s. And so in *Casey*, the court narrowly upheld *Roe*, which it might not have, it was really it wasn't clear at the time what the outcome would be. But they narrowly upheld *Roe*, and they also replaced its strict scrutiny framework that made it very difficult for states to regulate abortion, with an entirely new

framework called the undue burden standard. And the undue burden standard said that states can regulate abortion, so long as the regulations do not place a substantial obstacle in the path of people seeking abortions. And substantial obstacle is like a quote from that rule— that is the definition of undue burden. And as you can imagine, it might not have cleared things up to the extent that people were hoping, right? What's a substantial obstacle? What's undue? So, after that ruling, a bunch of states did begin enforcing parental involvement laws, and mandatory waiting periods. And so my research really turned to studying those effects. I showed the parental involvement laws, increase births. I showed that mandatory waiting periods delay and prevent people from seeking abortions, if they require two trips to the provider, not if they require one. And then I also studied what we call supply side regulations, which were policies that states really shifted to into the 2000s that instead of targeting people seeking abortions, were targeting the providers of abortions with really onerous and medically unnecessary restrictions on, for instance, saying that the providers had to have admitting privileges at nearby hospitals, or they had to be licensed as ambulatory surgical centers. And basically, I think, transparently, seeking to close abortion facilities, and succeeding and doing so. So, my work was really studying those restrictions that were enforced for 25 years from the *Casey* ruling until very recently, when there was the *Dobbs* ruling. And with the *Dobbs* ruling, I'm transitioning to studying the biggest changes in abortion access and fifty years, right? Now we've got full on bans again.

Can you describe some of your methods for gathering data?

Yeah. My methods, I'll say, involve being really, really, really obsessive and willing to spend enormous amounts of time gathering and wrangling data. In fact, I think in some ways, like that's how I've managed to make an impact in this field is because so much of the data that we need to implement credible research designs just weren't available. So for instance, studying the effects of abortion legalization required having a really detailed understanding of exactly what the policies were in each state, at any given period of time and which populations they applied to. And those policies are complicated, right? And then more recently, if you're going to study the effects of mandatory waiting periods or parental involvement laws, I needed to create a panel of policies where I know what the policy is throughout time. And again, I just have to dive into the statutes like I read, I read a lot of legislative statutes. I read a lot of judicial rulings. I spend a lot of time just very carefully figuring out and documenting what the state of access was. And then

more recently, and frankly, it turned out to be even more difficult, I really wanted to begin to understand how distance to abortion facilities affected outcomes, because as we turned to supply side regulations, facilities began to close. And the question was, as facilities closed, do people still get there? Or do they not? And it was, it was a really interesting question and I can go into it a little bit, like what economists thought, what federal judges thought, but in any event, we couldn't answer it if we didn't know what the distances were. And so, my most recent giant data gathering effort was to use a whole combination of techniques, including web scraping, to assemble a database of all publicly identifiable abortion facilities in the United States, going back to January 1st of 2009. And so I have a database, that's every facility. I've got eight hundred pages of documentation that's just detailed notes about them. And, crucially, when you get to quantitative analysis, what I've got are the dates a facility opened, the dates it closed, and in many places where the states are trying to regulate facilities out of existence, I'll have them open, close, open, close, open, close. And on any given day, I can tell you if the facility was operating or not.

Were you ever studying the increase in popularity of the abortion pill?

Yeah, so I haven't directly studied it, but it's a fascinating question right now. So I'd love to talk a little bit about it, and what I might do in the future or what somebody else might do, because it's so important. So the FDA approved mifepristone for use in the abortion pill more than twenty years ago, I think, I don't remember the exact date off the top of my head, I want to say it's 2002, but might be 2000. I can't remember. In any event, more than twenty years ago, it was approved and it's used in combination with another drug called misoprostol for medication abortions. It's very safe, it's very effective. And it slowly began to diffuse to US abortion providers and, cut to the present, more than fifty percent of abortions by the time *Dobbs* was being decided, were medication abortions. And I also know from my own database—which is where the statistic comes from— that forty percent of US abortion facilities only provide medication abortion, they do not provide procedural abortions at all. And in addition, all of the telehealth facilities obviously are only providing medication abortion. So it's become a really important part of the US abortion landscape. And that has accelerated dramatically in the aftermath of the *Dobbs* decision. Already, it was accelerating because states that are supportive of abortion rights were, for instance, relaxing regulations to allow more telehealth provision of medication abortion and

to allow Advanced Practice clinicians like nurse practitioners to prescribe it. And so already it was accelerating. But *Dobbs* really caused a lot more kind of attention to abortion supply in these states and you start to see more and more people becoming aware of it as an option. There were more telehealth providers. And so we've got limited data, we're about to have more. But the limited data we have so far suggests that medication abortion has just increased since *Dobbs*. And so, I think it's really fascinating for two reasons. First, I have a feeling from the limited data we've got, that *Dobbs* has had an almost paradoxical effect on abortion access in liberal states. It really looks like more people are accessing abortion in states like California and New York because of expanded access to medication abortion. Even as, and I can talk about this in a bit, even more people are also trapped in bad states who can't get out. And the other reason I think that it's really interesting is that there's a case that's been appealed to the US Supreme Court. The plaintiffs in the case are Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine. And basically, we don't yet know if the Supreme Court will grant cert and take up the case. But, and we obviously don't know what they might rule, but the range of possibilities is very wide. And it ranges from absolutely nothing happens to access to medication, abortion, to medication abortion, or at least before mifepristone becomes unavailable. Or there's even a more extreme option, which is that the court decides that a 19th century law called the Comstock Act, applies to abortion, and prohibits the distribution of abortifacient medications and devices across state lines. And I mean, that's huge everywhere. And we don't know. But I'm watching it really carefully because I think medication abortion has become increasingly important to access. And also, access is tenuous, given that case,

In line with the more harsh laws after *Dobbs* in certain states, has that changed your ability to gather research and study this issue?

Yeah, it's changed everybody's ability. And I would say that one of the biggest impacts it's had on data availability is that the states that have now banned abortion used to be, on average, some of the states that had the most complete surveillance of abortion rates. So, one of the things that's happened is that people who work in this field have become less able to get the level of detail on abortion data that we used to. So it's becoming even harder to know how many abortions are taking place in this country. And that's really tough. There are two organizations that are making

large and important and fruitful efforts to address it. One is the Society of Family Planning, which has a we count initiative. They're collecting data directly from abortion providers, and I think about eighty percent of us abortion providers are sharing counts with them. And the other is the Guttmacher Institute, which is also collecting data from providers and augmenting it with some statistical methods to fill in the blanks. But it really has complicated our ability to do research. But beyond that issue, for me, personally, at a private institution in Vermont, it hasn't impacted my ability to do research. I wonder, but don't know, if I would be telling you something different if I were at a public university in a state that was hostile to abortion rights. There's a lot of great people at public universities in states that are banning abortion doing research on it.

Can you talk a little bit about the amicus brief you authored for *Dobbs*?

Yeah, so I'll go back in time a little bit and say that, for a long time, I resisted invitations to provide evidence in legal conversations around abortion. And I did so for a few reasons. The first is that I'm a scientist, not an activist. And I actually personally have some ambivalence about abortion. I did not come to this field out of a strongly held desire to further reproductive justice, I came to as an economist, who is really interested in gender differentials in labor markets, who knows that motherhood is the single largest explanatory factor for that. And who knows that abortion access is closely tied to people's control over the circumstances under which they become mothers, or parents. And I just wanted to study it, because I've got an academic interest in the topic. But you know, it turns out as I continue to do this work that what a lot of my papers were doing was measuring the burdens, right? So under the *Casey* standard, federal courts were supposed to consider whether certain regulations were placing substantial obstacles in the past for people seeking abortion. Well, my work measure is that, right? My work measures, if you have a two trip mandatory waiting period, how many people are going to get pushed to the second trimester? How many people are going to not get abortions at all who otherwise wanted them? I can measure those burdens. And that was salient under the *Casey* standard. And so I got invitations, I got a few invitations to serve as an expert witness in these cases. And I kept saying no. I said no, partly because I was really busy. I had young children, I'm teaching a lot of classes at Middlebury. A lot of times these cases move very fast and I can't necessarily just kick up and fly to another state to provide testimony in the middle of the semester. But also honestly, you know, I said no, because I was worried that it might make economists suspect that I had some

sort of conflict of interest. And then I had like a real revelation, like, yeah, I don't have too many of these moments in my life that I can point to. This one's very specific. I was asked if I might provide an expert report on a case. And I said no. I was too busy. And they went ahead with the case. And they had another so called expert, both sides had so called experts. And another economist sent me a transcript of the testimony in court in that case, and they spent hours in court talking about a paper I'd co-authored. And I really felt like the experts were not accurately and fully delivering the facts to the court. And I just had this absolute revelation, maybe I should have known this. But I really had this moment where I thought, "oh, wait, you can't just produce scientific evidence and publish it in an esoteric journal, that economists read with lots of numbers with stars by them, and then expect that people who are making important decisions relying on evidence will see it and understand it." Like, you can't just send your science out there and abandon it, you actually have to go with it and translate it to the public. And so I stopped saying no. I didn't say yes all the time cause I can't say yes all the time. But I agreed to work as an expert witness in some cases for the Center for Reproductive Rights and for Planned Parenthood. And it was fascinating, and rewarding. I learned a lot. I learned more about the landscape of access, I gained connections, I got to ask people questions about what they were seeing on the ground. It made me think more critically about the context or some of my papers, it made me a better researcher, not a worse researcher, because I knew more. And to do a really good job with big complicated data, you've got to have a deep nuanced understanding of the environment, and it gave me that. So it really, in the end, I feel like helped me enormously. But I had no expectation that I would be involved in *Dobbs*. So what happened in the *Dobbs* case was that when then President Trump had a third Supreme Court appointment, it was clear that the writing was on the wall for a *Roe* and states that were hostile to abortion began to rush— there was like this race to pass abortion bans that violated the *Roe* and *Casey* standards, right. And the legislators who were passing these, like they knew that, that was clear. They were saying that they wanted to challenge *Roe* and *Casey*. And it was really just a question of which states' ban would make it to the Supreme Court. These all went really quickly, the one that ultimately made it was one of Mississippi's bans, they had multiple ones. But basically, what had happened in Mississippi was the legislature passed a pre-viability ban. The only abortion facility that was left in Mississippi at that point, challenged it, represented by the Center for Reproductive Rights. And almost no evidence was submitted in the case because it was clearly a violation of *Roe*. So

all that happened, basically, was that a district court said, “Yeah, Mississippi, you can't do this.” And then Mississippi appealed it to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. And they said, “Yeah,” they're a very conservative court. And they said, “We kind of wish you could do this, but you can't.” And then it got appealed to the Supreme Court. So when it was arriving at the Supreme Court, it was arriving with not much of a body of evidence on facts. A lot of times cases arrive with that, but there weren't many experts involved with this. There weren't many facts. And I assumed that wasn't actually a crucial issue in the case, because I assumed the case would be all about constitutional law. And whether the Constitution establishes a right to privacy that protects abortion or not. I have an opinion about that as a person and as a citizen. But like my economic evidence does not have anything to bear on that. So I thought I was just gonna be watching this one from the sidelines. And what I really failed to anticipate was the role societal reliance would end up playing in the case. So when Mississippi submitted their brief to the Supreme Court, Mississippi knew that the Supreme Court is very reluctant to overturn its own precedents, which is this principle of stare decisis. That's a pretty high bar to clear. They worry about reducing their legitimacy by second guessing or overturning their own decisions. So what Mississippi said to the court was, “we know you worry about this, and we know in fact, that in *Casey*, you worried about this.” One of the things that the Supreme Court said in the *Casey* ruling was, “it would be a really big deal for us to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, because people have come to rely on the legal access to abortion to plan their lives.” And they called that “societal reliance.” And so what Mississippi said was, “you know, when you said that in *Casey*, there were no facts to bear that out. And there still are no facts to bear that out.” They said two things, really. And I think these two things are contradictory. They said there's no way to know what the causal effects of abortion access are in people's lives. And they said too, abortion access doesn't have causal effects on people's lives. And I think you really have to pick one. But regardless of which of those you pick, you're wrong, because they're not true. And so when Mississippi makes this case that there's no societal reliance, I recognized that that's where economists have a lot to say. And the folks at the Center for Reproductive Rights did too. So the way writing an amicus brief works is somebody reaches out and says this could be helpful. The parties aren't hugely involved beyond that, at least in my experience, but you understand there's a helpful question. So, one of the attorneys at the Center for Reproductive Rights sent me Mississippi's brief and said, “Do you have anything to say about this?” And I was like, “Oh, you guys know me so well, I have so

much to say.” And it's not the role of economists to weigh in on constitutional law, or when personhood begins or like, ethics or philosophy. But we know a lot about the causal effects of abortion on people's lives. Like there's a huge literature and I'm part of it, but I'm not by any means all of it. There's tons of economists working in this area. And so I basically agreed to author the brief view. It's the one and only time in my life I've done it. And I'll mention like economists have actually— we didn't file a brief in *Roe* or *Casey*, this was the first time economists have done it. But I agreed to spearhead it. I drafted an outline of the entire thing and the arguments I thought we should put forth. And then I sent it to eight other economists who work a lot in the field. And I said, regardless of whether you want to sign on to this, I want to make sure that every single thing we say is accepted fact. So let's go through every single bit of this and make sure all of us, we don't agree on everything, but we need to agree on everything that's in here. And it was great like, we had a Google Doc, and we had a whole conversation going and there's back and forth. It was really interesting, actually, because we were all having conversations about how do you provide an overview of the literature? And what does it say? And what are you not sure it says, so you don't present because you're not sure? And in the end, we came up with, I think, a lot of really important things to say that were consensus. And with the help of the attorneys representing us, they helped with some of the language. It's hard, I write like an economist, not like a lawyer. So they helped write like attorneys. And then I basically just kind of word of mouth asked if other economists wanted to sign on with very little notice. And we got flooded, absolutely flooded. So, like more than one hundred and fifty economists signed on, including Claudia Goldin, who just won the Nobel Prize for studying women in the economy. So I mean, that was the process of writing it. I dropped everything for six weeks, including, frankly, drafting a false syllabus. So don't ask my regression class from that year about my syllabus. But I dropped everything and wrote a brief.

Was the brief well received by the court?

It was really interesting. So the Supreme Court held oral arguments for this case. I'm trying to remember, it was October or November, but it was definitely a bit later in the fall semester, because the oral arguments were on a day when I was teaching my regression analysis lab. And I teach three sections in a row in the basement of the library, it's like a windowless room. And so I didn't want to cancel class. I don't cancel class. But I was listening to oral arguments in between.

And my students all knew that I was a little obsessed with this right. So they were kind of stuck listening to arguments. This class kind of went in and out and then I would turn it off and teach a lab. But it just so happened, that it was in between labs, and I was listening when the brief came up. And so Justice Roberts asked the attorney for the Center for Reproductive Rights, representing Jackson Women's Health Organization about this question of societal reliance. And he said, "Look, is there any evidence that abortion has a causal effect on people's lives?" And the attorney Julie Rikelman, said, "I would refer your honor to the economists' amicus brief." And then she started into, I thought, an extraordinarily accurate and coherent explanation of the statistical tools of causal inference that we had used in the brief and what we found. And it was kind of an amazing moment, honestly, because I'm sitting there with a bunch of Middlebury College students. And we're listening to the Supreme Court hearing the methods that I'm teaching them in class, like, this is what we're doing in class, and the Supreme Court's hearing the methods. And so, you know, I'm kind of having this moment of like, it's very exciting as a teacher. It's very exciting as a scholar to see fifteen years of research being presented in this pivotal moment. But that moment of joy lasted about ten seconds, because Justice Roberts, as Attorney Rikelman's kind of getting into it, he interrupted her. And he said, "Okay, let's set aside the evidence." And he just changed the subject. And people wrote about it, you can find like Dahlia Lithwick wrote about that moment, because like, it was a little bit jaw dropping, for me at least. And it was really discouraging for me because I really understand the ethical divides on abortion, like I am from the conservative, deep South, every state I've lived in before Vermont has banned abortion. I have family members who feel very strongly that it is murder. And these are people I love and respect, I don't think they're misogynists. I get it that we've got some really thorny issues here. I get it. And I also believe in evidence based policy. And some of the really important questions in this case, they weren't about ethics, you could set that aside for a second because they were about facts. And to see the facts just dismissed was really discouraging for me as somebody who spends a career producing facts. But yeah, so was it well received? I think the court was going to do what the court was going to do.

You said before you consider yourself to be a feminist, not an activist. Can you expand on that?

Well you know, it's really interesting, asking people if they consider themselves to be feminists, I think people have different definitions and different versions of that. For me, it's as simple as believing in the fundamental equality of all people, and believing that we should study and consider barriers that are set up that are inequitable and prevent certain groups of people from achieving the same fundamental goals and rights as other groups. It's like a simple issue for me. And so in that sense, I'm a feminist. I also tend to be a very politically moderate person. And I think it's just my nature, that I vote in every election, I vote in local elections, I follow everything very carefully. I have opinions as a citizen. But also my nature is such that I really like sitting at my computer and analyzing data and coming up with facts. And I think there's an important role for me to play there in doing that. And so I think if I were to become an activist, which I'm not likely to do, that would actually make it harder for me to do my work as a scientist. And so I kind of like my niche. And I respect activists on both sides. Because I think this is how we become a better society is for people to get out there and advocate for what they believe. And also, I'm gonna get my computer running regressions.

I know you focus so primarily on the data. But since this is such a partisan issue, how do you navigate that when you're gathering data, talking to people, just because there are so many inherent biases?

Yeah, I think it helps that I have lots of people in my life, who I love and respect, who have different beliefs about abortion than I do. I think that actually helps me take a deep breath, because it helps, I think, that if I'm sitting in a courtroom, and there's people on both sides, I actually am not looking across the aisle, thinking that the other side is like "the bad people." That's just not my frame of mind at all. I think this is a hard issue. And I really hope that a lot of people, I think the only way we move forward is for us to try to engage it in good faith. And so I try to be part of that. I will say that there are tricky parts of it for me. I do have a personal belief, of course, and I am personally pro-choice. I don't think that would surprise anybody, that that's where I land, but like a lot of people who land I am pro-choice and I also think it's a thorny issue, right? Like, I can understand why people feel a lot of anguish about it. I try to just take a deep breath and present the facts and in doing so also share the data, because in my line of work, the

things I say are things that can be replicated, right? I'm a scientist and replication is a cornerstone of the scientific method. So if I tell you that I've estimated the effective driving distance for people seeking abortions, and that a hundred mile increase prevents about twenty percent of people who want abortions from reaching providers, you can actually go check that because I publish online and give everybody my data, right? And so everybody who can use a statistical package and you know, could run a regression and understand what the technique means, but like, they can take my data and run this for themselves. And I like that, because ideally, it's not that science can't go wrong. But like, that's what keeps us honest in science is replication, right? And also just for making a mistake, sometimes you just make a mistake. It's not dishonest. But so for me, it's like getting the data out there. And that's one of the reasons that I publish all my data all over the place, which not all academics do. But I publish the driving distance data at Open Science Framework. I've assembled counts of abortions by county that are there, all my abortion policy data is there, all the documentation for it is there. I publish all my program files, so that people in the field can track me, and they do. And so far, you know, knock on wood, it's all held up, and like lots of people are building on the work.

Do you see those referenced really frequently in different things?

I see the referenced, yeah, for sure. First of all, I share them a lot with media. And so my abortion facility database has been used, and depending on what they want, the media can either just take my public data, or I have some restricted use data. I don't publish the locations of abortion facilities, because I don't— they're subjected to harassment and violence— and I don't want to— they're all discoverable because they're all publicly advertising— but I don't want to make it easy for somebody to, for instance, just mass harass them with a mail merge, right? So like, I don't publish their identities. But if like a media organization wants to do something specifically to create a map, and we have like a Data Use Agreement, I share it. And it's been used a lot in the *New York Times*, we actually— I'd possibly be hard pressed to come up with major news sources that haven't used it. So I share it a lot with media. It gets used in court cases when people are talking about driving distance. And it's used by academics, like I see it cited, and people email me about it. And I think it's about to be used even more, because there's this whole flurry of new research.

Kind of on the flurry of new research, do you have anything kind of coming up that you're looking to?

Yeah, so I published a new working paper, just before Thanksgiving, so just a week and a half ago. That's, I think, I'm really proud of it. So my co-authors on this paper are Daniel Dench and Mayra Pineda-Torres, who are both at Georgia Tech. They're both really talented economists who are fairly new in their careers. And this paper is the very first paper to estimate the effects of *Dobbs* on births, and to provide evidence on the causal effects of the first set of total bans that were enforced after *Dobbs* on birth rates. And it's really important because until that, until we can measure that which we just measured, we couldn't know if everybody was finding a way or not. Like we could tell from the abortion data we have that people are flooding out of ban states, those people are finding a way. Like we see them show up at abortion facilities in Illinois and Kansas and New Mexico. They're finding a way. We also know that requests to organizations that will mail medication into banned states had gone up. We were never quite sure— it's really hard to tell what happens next, so we're not sure if people took the medication. But we knew the requests were going up. And so maybe everybody was getting the abortion they wanted. It's harder, but they were still getting it. But all of my past research suggests that that wasn't super likely. And so with the births data, what we were able to do is compare trends in births and ban states, to trends in births in a set of control states that had been trending really similarly to the ban states before *Dobbs*. And the data shows something that is just stark, which is that these states have similar trends and births, right up until six months after *Dobbs*. Six months after *Dobbs* is when you're going to start seeing births result from people not being able to obtain abortions the last summer, right because of gestation. And you see it's January 2023, you see them diverge. And it looks like there will be about 30,000 additional births this year resulting from those bans. People who weren't able— who otherwise would have obtained an abortion but didn't. So that's roughly—and this is a bit back of the envelope— but that's probably about a fifth of people from the states who wanted abortions who didn't find a way out. I think it's really important information to understand. We're no longer measuring burdens for the Supreme Court. But if we were, I think that would be classified as a substantial burden. These are people who didn't find a way out. It also means that these are families and they're overwhelmingly poor and vulnerable women. Women of color are much more affected than non-hispanic white women. It tends to be young women. They tend to already be parenting. And we know that experiencing an

unintended birth as a result of being denied unwanted abortion has tremendous impacts on the financial stability of these families, which can then reverberate through all sorts of outcomes. So, you know, the results are brand new, it's a week and a half old, but I think it is going to motivate— I hope it will motivate both studying the downstream effects on people's lives and also thinking about the social safety net in the states. Because here, I'm going to not be dispassionate, which is unusual for me, but here, I'm gonna have a strongly held opinion, I get that people don't all agree on abortion. I don't understand why we can't all agree on supporting poor children. I just don't get it. And so I am presenting this work that shows these children are being born. And they're being born states that have the most frayed social safety nets in the country. And I really wish we could think about how to stitch those social safety nets up to provide more support, if nothing else.

That's a really powerful note to end on. I think that's kind of most of my questions, unless there's anything else you want to add.

I haven't said one thing that I want to be archived forever, which is that none of this would be possible without Middlebury students. Middlebury students have helped me this entire fifteen years as research assistants. They've helped you with statutes. They've helped me with monitoring abortion facility locations, they've helped me with monitoring appointment availability. And so I just want to say like, nobody's a lone wolf in research. So when you're gathering all of this really complicated data, you need lots of help and Middlebury students have pitched in for years. And it's really awesome. And I'm very grateful for it.

Okay, perfect. Well, thank you again, so much.