

Kurtis Gilliat

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Education

University of California, San Diego 2020–Present
Ph.D. in Economics (Expected 2027)
Advisors: Gordon Dahl (co-chair), Samuel Bazzi (co-chair), Eli Berman, Itzik Fadlon

Brigham Young University 2012–2018
B.S. in Economics and Mathematics, Summa Cum Laude

Fields of Interest

Labor Economics, Political Economy

Job Market Paper

From Pews to Polls: The Effects of Church Peer Groups on Political Behavior (with Jacob Brown)

We estimate the causal effect of peer partisan composition on party affiliation and voter turnout. Our setting is Utah, where members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are assigned to geographically defined congregations (“wards”). We exploit periodic ward boundary adjustments—made to accommodate changes in local church attendance—using a geographic difference-in-discontinuities design that compares changes in political outcomes among individuals who belonged to the same ward at baseline but were subsequently reassigned to wards with different partisan compositions. We find that peer composition affects party affiliation and voter turnout through distinct channels. For party affiliation, exposure to co-partisan peers increases the likelihood of adopting that party: being assigned to the more Republican side of a boundary raises an Independent’s probability of registering Republican by about 1.3 percentage points. For voter turnout, we find effects consistent with negative mobilization: co-partisan exposure reduces turnout by about 1 percentage point, while cross-partisan exposure increases it by 1–2 percentage points. A placebo test using future boundaries and a simulated-boundary exercise both support the identifying assumption. Heterogeneity analysis suggests that party switching is driven by persuasion through close (same-gender) ties, while turnout effects operate through broader exposure to opposing views. Our results indicate that sustained interaction in a nonpolitical congregational setting has a small but robust causal effect on political identity and civic participation.

Work in Progress

It Takes a Village to Raise a Business: How Congregational Networks Facilitate Entrepreneurship

Marriage Markets and Church Building: The Economics of Polygamy in the American West

Publications

“Mortality Risk and Fine Particulate Air Pollution in a Large, Representative Cohort of U.S. Adults” (with C.A. Pope III, J.S. Lefler, M. Ezzati, J.D. Higbee, J.D. Marshall, S.Y. Kim, M. Bechle, S.E. Vernon, A.L. Robinson, and R.T. Burnett). *Environmental Health Perspectives*, 2019.

Presentations

ASREC (Association for the Study of Religion, Economics, and Culture) Conference	2026
All-California Labor Economics Conference (ACLEC) – Poster	2025
Southern California Graduate Conference in Applied Economics (SOCAE)	2025
BYU Economics Department Alumni Conference	2024

Teaching Experience

University of California, San Diego

Data Analytics for Social Scientists (Associate-In)	2025
Econometrics II (TA)	2021–2025
Public Economics (TA)	2022–2024
Principles of Macroeconomics (TA)	2024
Data Analytics for Social Scientists (TA)	2023
Long Run Macroeconomics (TA)	2023
Economic History of the United States (TA)	2021

University of Chicago

Behavioral Economics (TA)	2019
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Brigham Young University

International Trade (TA)	2018
Behavioral Economics (TA)	2018
Price Theory I (TA)	2016

Research Experience

University of California, San Diego

Research Assistant, Prof. Julian Betts	2022
Research Assistant, Prof. Samuel Bazzi	2022
Research Assistant, Prof. Sara Lowes	2022

University of Chicago

Pre-Doctoral Research Fellow, Prof. James Heckman	2018–2020
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Brigham Young University

Research Assistant, Prof. Arden Pope	2016–2018
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Research Assistant, Prof. James Cardon 2017–2018
Bates White Economic Consulting
Summer Consultant 2017

Professional Service

Co-founder/Director, Undergraduate-Graduate Economic Research Lab 2023–Present
Referee, *Journal of Development Economics* 2023
Organizing Committee, Southern California Graduate Conference in Applied Economics 2022

Fellowships, Grants, and Awards

University of California, San Diego

Yankelovich Center for Social Science Research Grant 2026
UCSD Travel and Research Grant 2024
Graduate Summer Research Fellowship 2021, 2022, 2023
UCSD Travel and Research Grant 2022
Regents Fellowship 2020–2021

Brigham Young University

Economics Department Valedictorian 2018
Thomas S. Monson Presidential Scholarship 2012–2018
National Merit Scholarship 2012

Skills

Languages: English (native), Portuguese (advanced)
Software: Stata, Python, R, QGIS

References

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Samuel Bazzi (co-chair)
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