

Economics Seminar  
Monday, October 2, 2023  
HH 434  
3:30-5 p.m.

Guest Speaker: Dr. Atheen Venkataramani

*Political Power and Health Equity: Evidence from the U.S. Voting Rights Act*

Racial disparities in mortality rates are increasingly thought to be driven by systemic factors. Theoretical research in economics and sociology suggests that intergroup differences in power may be a particularly important driver of these disparities. This study examines how intergroup mortality disparities shift after political power is granted to marginalized groups. Using the 1966 U.S. Voting Rights Act (VRA) as a natural experiment, we find that removing barriers to voting dramatically improved infant mortality rates among non-white births, with no change found for white births. The results are robust to a number of checks, including evaluating the 1976 extension of the VRA as a separate natural experiment. In all, the results suggest that, over a 20 year period, the VRA may have narrowed racial disparities in infant mortality by up to half.