



In a randomized evaluation of this training program, individuals (or groups) are randomly assigned to be offered the training (the treatment group) or not (the comparison group). For example, one group may hear from a speaker while another does not. Design credit: Lucy Nguyen

How does an evaluation's design impact a study's credibility?

When researchers design a study—such as a randomized evaluation—they rely on assumptions, like the assumption that people in a study are split into truly random groups. The credibility of any impact evaluation depends on whether those assumptions are plausible in a given context. J-PAL Research and Training Lead [Michala Riis-Vestergaard](#) explores what those assumptions are, why they matter, and how to assess them across different evaluation designs.

[Read the blog post](#)

Evidence in action in Latin America: Policy wins from Brazil and Guatemala

BR Rio de Janeiro, Brazil announced a collaboration with J-PAL and UChicago's [Emissions Market Accelerator](#) to bring the [first emissions trading market](#) to South America.

GT Guatemala's Ministry of Social Development is establishing a [policy innovation lab](#), a project that builds on [J-PAL Latin America and the Caribbean](#) (LAC) and Universidad del Valle de Guatemala's [Construyendo Futuros](#) (Growing Futures) initiative, to help ministry teams design, test, and improve programs before taking them to scale.

Learn more about how J-PAL supports governments turning evidence to policy. [Explore J-PAL LAC's government partnerships »](#)

The Bab Amal program: A door of hope in Egypt

"Bab Amal," which translates to "A Door of Hope," is helping some of Egypt's poorest families build stable livelihoods. The program, a variation of the [Graduation approach](#), was implemented by the Sawiris Foundation for Social Development and evaluated by [J-PAL Middle East and North Africa](#). The results: families owned more livestock, earned more income, had more access to food, and more women entered the workforce. With positive results holding strong for 40 months, the program is scaling to reach 100,000 households across upper Egypt. [Read the policy brief »](#)

EVIDENCE TO POLICY



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Improving cash transfers with machine learning

📍 Togo

Policy issue: During the Covid-19 pandemic, officials in Togo wanted to expand their emergency cash transfer program but didn't have up-to-date information on which households were most vulnerable. Traditional methods for collecting new data were time consuming and costly.

Evaluation: Researchers partnered with the Togolese government to test whether analyzing survey, mobile phone, and satellite data using machine learning could help identify the people most in need more quickly and accurately.

Results: The approach helped identify and enroll more than 138,500 vulnerable people for emergency cash transfers, reaching more eligible families than traditional geographic targeting efforts. Those who received the transfers ate more food, had better mental health, and improved their economic well-being.

Research in action: The government of Togo and GiveDirectly used this approach to support the expansion of the country's emergency cash transfer program to rural areas, reaching roughly 820,000 people nationwide. Similar approaches have since been adapted in Malawi, Bangladesh, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, laying the groundwork for faster, more cost-effective targeting of social assistance in response to floods, droughts, and other humanitarian crises.

[Read the case study »](#)

NEW POLICY INSIGHT



Photo credit: Shutterstock.com

Mobile phones can expand learning opportunities by supporting, not replacing, human interaction

A new J-PAL Policy Insight synthesizes thirty studies on how mobile phones impact student learning.

Policy issue: Students, teachers, parents and administrators need to share timely information with one another but in some communities, long distances, poor roads, school closures, and busy schedules can make this process costly and slow. Given that 95 percent of the global population has a phone in their pocket, could texting offer a low-cost way to deliver instruction, support teachers, and engage families?

Findings: In high-income settings where data systems are strong and parents already engage regularly with schools, simple text messages with practical, personalized information work well. In low- and middle-income countries, texts alone aren't enough. Programs that pair phone-based outreach with more intensive support, like tutoring by phone or cash incentives for teachers, show stronger results. The interventions that were most effective at improving student learning were ones that delivered practical, personalized information and used proven education programs like tailored instruction.

[Read the policy insight »](#)

FEATURED BLOGS



Institutionalizing and accelerating climate action through governments

At London Climate Action Week last month, [J-PAL's Air and Water Labs](#) co-hosted a conversation with Community Jameel bringing together government leaders from South Africa, Egypt, and India. Each country is working with J-PAL on innovative solutions, like an emissions trading scheme in Gujarat and Maharashtra and free basic electricity for low-income households in Cape Town. Together, they discussed how collaborative, long-term partnerships between researchers and institutions can turn evidence into sustained climate resilience.

[Read more »](#)

Researcher perspective: Students need guidance, not just access, when it comes to AI

J-PAL Invited Researcher [Sebastian Gallegos](#) (Universidad Adolfo Ibanez) designed and deployed a course-specific AI assistant in an undergraduate econometrics course in Chile to evaluate how students use AI. His findings suggest that institutional guidance may play a central role in determining whether AI tools support or hinder learning. [Read more »](#)

Learning across borders: How global exchange is helping shape Egypt's Universal Health Insurance reform

As Egypt rolls out its universal health insurance reforms, one major challenge has emerged: how to reach informal workers. [J-PAL Middle East and North Africa's Egypt Impact Lab](#) hosted a [Knowledge Exchange Webinar Series](#) to connect Egyptian policymakers with government leaders from Chile, Thailand, and Indonesia who had tackled similar questions over decades of expanding their own health coverage systems. These conversations helped Egyptian officials sharpen their approach and could pave the way for one of the first randomized evaluations on bringing informal workers into a national health insurance system in Egypt. [Read more »](#)

FEATURED EVENT

WEBINAR: Targeting foundational skills to improve learning at scale in Zambia

 **July 28 | 8:45-10:00am EST | Zoom**

Join us for a webinar on the impact of Zambia's "Catch Up" program, a government-led adaptation of the [Teaching at the Right Level](#) (TaRL) approach. J-PAL Invited Researcher Andreas de Barros (University of California, Irvine) and representatives from the Zambian Ministry of Education will share details of the program, [evaluation findings](#), and cost-effectiveness. A panel discussion will follow, featuring representatives from the Center for Global Development, the Gates Foundation, TaRL Africa and VVOB.

[Register here »](#)

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

[For Viksit Bharat, the most important foundations need to be laid in the classroom – at the right level](#)

The Indian Express

[Innovative projects explore ways to deal with extreme heat](#)

MIT News

[J-PAL joins leading institutions to launch Smart Buys Alliance for Evidence-Based Development](#)

J-PAL

[From RCT to real-world impact: How our accelerator is adapting the evidence on immunization demand in Nigeria](#)

Evidence Action

[RGUHS delegation visits MIT, Harvard to explore healthcare and research collaboration](#)

Vartha Bharati



NEW RESEARCH PAPERS

[Information, Intermediaries, and International Migration](#)

Authors: [Samuel Bazzi](#) (University of California, San Diego), [Lisa Cameron](#) (University of Melbourne), [Simone Schaner](#) (University of Southern California), and [Firman Witoelar](#) (Australia National University)

[Addressing Weak links in Government Implementation at Scale: Experimental Evidence from a School Governance Reform in Tanzania](#)

Authors: [Jacobus Cilliers](#) (Georgetown) and [James Habyarimana](#) (Georgetown)

[On the Doorstep of Adulthood: Entrepreneurship and Fertility of Young Women in Tanzania](#)

Authors: [Lars Ivar Oppedal Berge](#) (Norwegian School of Economics), [Kjetil Bjorvatn](#) (Norwegian School of Economics), [Fortunata Makene](#) (Economic and Social Research Foundation), [Linda Helgesson Sekei](#) (NIRAS International Consulting), [Vincent Somville](#) (Norwegian School of Economics), [Bertil Tungodden](#) (Norwegian School of Economics)



OPEN POSITIONS

FEATURED JOB: [Senior Policy Manager](#), Zurich, Switzerland

[Finance and Operations Associate](#), Brazil

[Policy Manager](#), São Paulo, Brazil

[Research Associate](#), Guatemala

[Senior Research Associate](#), São Paulo, Brazil

[Research Manager](#), Jakarta, Indonesia

[Senior Policy Manager](#), Cambridge, MA, United States

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