

**Authors**

Michael Kremer  
The University of Chicago

Edward Miguel  
University of California, Berkeley  
Center for Effective Global Action (CEGA)

Rebecca Thornton  
Professor of Economics

Willa Friedman  
University of Houston

**Education as Liberation?<sup>\*</sup>**

Willa Friedman  
University of Houston

Michael Kremer  
Harvard University and NBER

Edward Miguel  
University of California, Berkeley and NBER

Rebecca Thornton  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

September 2015

**Abstract:** Scholars have long speculated about education's political impacts, variously arguing that it promotes modern or pro-democratic attitudes; that it instills acceptance of existing authority; and that it empowers the disadvantaged to challenge authority. This paper studies the political and social impacts of increased education. To address the potential threat of bias from selection into human capital investment, we utilize a randomized girls' merit scholarship incentive program in Kenya that raised test scores and secondary schooling. We find little evidence for modernization theory. Consistent with the empowerment view, young women in program schools were less likely to accept domestic violence. Moreover, the program increased objective political knowledge, and reduced acceptance of political authority. However, this rejection of the status quo did not translate into greater perceived political efficacy, community participation, or voting intentions. Instead, there is suggestive evidence that the perceived legitimacy of political violence increased. Reverse causality may account for the view that education instills greater acceptance of authority.

<sup>\*</sup> We thank seminar audiences at Stanford University, the Working Group for African Political Economy meeting at Berkeley, the JEA Conference on Ethnic Diversity and Economic Inequality in Kenya, the Oxford Centre for the Study of African Economies Conference, and University of Virginia for helpful comments. We appreciate helpful comments from Daron Acemoglu, Abhijit Banerjee, Marcel Fichamps, Ray Fisman, Naboni Ichim, and Dan Posner, and two anonymous referees. Konay Ajari, Blaise Bwire, Lorenzo Casaburi, Gunnar Christenson, Joan Hamery Hicks and Owen Oziar provided excellent research assistance. We are grateful to the National Institutes of Health, National Science Foundation and Social Science Research Council for generous research support. The usual disclaimer applies.  
Corresponding author: Edward Miguel (emiguel@berkeley.edu).

## Education as Liberation?

Scholars have long speculated about education's political impacts, variously arguing that it promotes modern or pro-democratic attitudes; that it instills acceptance of existing authority; and that it empowers the disadvantaged to challenge authority. This paper studies the political and social impacts of increased education. To address the potential threat of bias from selection into human capital investment, we utilize a randomized girls' merit scholarship incentive program in Kenya that raised test scores and secondary schooling. We find little evidence for modernization theory. Consistent with the empowerment view, young women in

program schools were less likely to accept domestic violence. Moreover, the program increased objective political knowledge, and reduced acceptance of political authority. However, this rejection of the status quo did not translate into greater perceived political efficacy, community participation, or voting intentions. Instead, there is suggestive evidence that the perceived legitimacy of political violence increased. Reverse causality may account for the view that education instills greater acceptance of authority.

September 01, 2015