

# Baker Briefing

Research from the Howard H. Baker Jr. Center for Public Policy

March 2023



**HOWARD H. BAKER JR.  
CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY**

## Leadership & Governance



### Investing in the Workforce

States are placing more importance on higher education as an economic development tool, and some states are trying to align funding models with student labor market outcomes.

In the first [study](#) to examine whether a popular funding strategy improves the

earnings of former students, Baker Center Affiliate [Robert Kelchen](#) and his coauthors find modest evidence that tying funding to student outcomes can increase earnings in the very short term.



### Should You Go to College?

In 2019, 58 percent of Tennesseans 25 and older had at least some college-level education. The impacts of Covid-19 and labor shortages throughout the U.S. economy, however, have improved the outlook for workers without college-level education. A tight labor market, high college costs, high

rates of student loan default, and growth in job opportunities for workers without college have led many to question if college is still worth the cost.

A coauthored [paper](#) by Baker Center Affiliate [Celeste Carruthers](#) studies the post-pandemic return to college. Her research showed Tennessee employment looks favorable for high school-level jobs in manufacturing, leisure, and hospitality. But the research also showed pay gains have been larger for workers with a college-level education, and jobs requiring a college-level degree are growing faster in the state than high school-level jobs.

## Energy & Environment



### Is Your Well Water Clean?

The health of 44 million Americans who depend upon private wells for drinking water is at risk because of a severe time gap between when private wells are tested for bacteria and when they are likely to become

contaminated. [Charles Sims](#), director of the

Energy & Environment Program, coauthored a paper that suggests testing for groundwater contamination should be optimally timed to ensure the full benefits of testing are realized and a serious public health issue is avoided.

The [research](#) indicated bacterial contamination was more correlated with warmer summer months. Testing only once a year in colder months can create a time gap, contributing to a false sense of security because those results do not provide the year-round likelihood of bacterial presence in the water.



### Vaccine Distribution

Three years into the Covid-19 pandemic, there are several vaccines against the disease, but developing countries are still trying to decide how to allocate their limited supply of the vaccine.

A joint [study](#) by [Charles Sims](#), director of the Energy & Environment Program, compares alternative allocation distribution rules for the Covid vaccine. The pro-rata rule, referring to the recommendation to allocate vaccines based on a country's relative population, performed better than an optimal rule that minimizes the economic damages and expenditures over time.



### Penchoff Joins Consortium for Nuclear Forensics

Baker Center Fellow [Deborah Penchoff](#) joined DOE's National Nuclear Security Administration Consortium for Nuclear Forensics (CNF). Penchoff will lead the High-Performance Computing and Data Science/Artificial Intelligence focus area, providing critical computing applications to develop solutions for needs in the CNF's focus areas. The 31 scientists and engineers involved in the consortium are developing new techniques and training in nuclear forensics, better

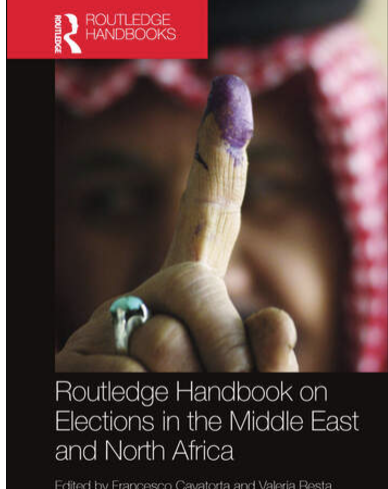
preparing undergraduates and graduate students to enter the workforce. For more information on the project, please see the [DOE Press Release](#).

## Global Security



### Wiegand Gives Lecture in Indo-Pacific

In February, director of the Global Security Program [Krista Wiegand](#) gave three lectures about security in the Indo-Pacific region and the South China Sea disputes to about 600 students and faculty at three universities in the Philippines. Wiegand was one of two U.S. experts speaking in the Forum on U.S.-Philippines Alliance and Indo-Pacific Security, sponsored by the U.S. Embassy-Manila/Department of State and Pacific Forum.



### Buehler Publishes Book Chapter

Elections in non-democratic states work to reinforce autocrats' rule by enhancing regimes' symbolic cults of personality, distributing clientelist goodies to loyalists, and providing a safety valve for citizens to voice discontent. Global Security Senior Fellow [Matt Buehler](#) and graduate student Calista Boyd published a book chapter examining this subject titled "The Functions of Authoritarian Elections: Symbolism, Safety Values, and Clientelism" in the *Routledge Handbook on Elections in the Middle East and North Africa*.



### Uzonyi Award Seed Money for Lab to Study Conflict

Global Security Fellow [Gary Uzonyi](#) and University of Missouri professor Bryce Reeder were awarded seed money from the University of Tennessee and the University of Missouri, respectively, to create an inter-university lab on the spatial study of conflict. This lab will provide research opportunities for faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates to identify unique aspects of urban spaces, compare rural/urban divides, and consider how the conflict process unfolds spatially around cities.

The lab will also offer an exchange program to faculty and students to promote face-to-face group collaboration, practice presenting research, professionalization training, and interest in the graduate programs and departments at each university. There are plans to expand the lab throughout the SEC.

## Student Spotlight



Knoxville native John Frazier is a Baker Ambassador and Scholar at the Howard H. Baker Jr. Center. Frazier is a junior majoring in political science and philosophy with a concentration in legal and political philosophy. He is also a Knoxville and Congressional Fellow.

*"I have been given so many opportunities and have had so many doors open in my life that otherwise would have been impossible. I am so thankful for all the staff and fellow students who make the Baker Center what it is."*

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