November 2017 Call for Papers: Research Topics and Questions

US 2050’s first call for papers in November 2017 included the questions listed below. The deadline for submitting proposals in response to that call for papers has now passed, and authors of successful proposals were notified March 1. (The March 2018 call for papers can be found here.)

How does the consideration of changing demographics affect our understanding of future labor force participation and productivity? What are the implications for fiscal sustainability?

- What is behind recent trends for men and women among various segments of the population and what factors may shape labor force participation in the future? What role does the high rate of incarceration of African America and Latino young men play? How do attitudes toward the changing composition of jobs (e.g., more health-related jobs, fewer manufacturing jobs; more contingent jobs, fewer permanent jobs) differentially affect men and women, and how do attitudes vary by race and ethnicity?
- Are women and minorities over-represented in non-traditional jobs (e.g., temp, contingent work, gig economy)? If so, why, what are the implications for the future and what might be the policy response?
- What does the increasing use of automation and other advanced technologies imply for the future number and types of jobs, as well as the education level and skill sets needed of workers to fill those jobs? What do these types of changes across sectors and occupations imply for workers’ incomes, the distribution of national income, and the fiscal outlook?
- How do gig economy jobs interact with the social safety net and what are resulting implications for future fiscal policy?
- How does productivity vary by age? Does this vary by sub-group? By generation? How could these differences affect the future economy?
- What policies might be most helpful in boosting labor force participation? How should policies account for differences in ability to continue working across different jobs and industries? What would be the impact of higher labor force participation on economic growth?
- How and why do actual and optimal patterns of retirement saving and retirement vary among segments of the population? How do these patterns affect the long-term fiscal outlook? How do public policies affect retirement decisions and do they affect different groups differently?

How do returns to education differ by race and ethnicity, and why? Are differences likely to persist?

- To what extent do different racial, ethnic, or gender groups with the same level of education have similar or difference returns to that education? How do industry of employment or career paths affect these?
- How sensitive are productivity assumptions to the quality of education? Would metrics other than educational attainment provide better insight into labor quality?
What do we know about how the quality of education differs across groups? Are disparities adequately measured? What about returns to job training? If the employer demand for “social skills” is rising, what are the implications of that? Do these differences persist when controlling for, say, choices of major?

How much of the differences between educational benefits are driven by the particular skills acquired when receiving a degree?

How do differences in health status among different segments of the population influence labor force participation, educational attainment, productivity, and the fiscal outlook?

What is the impact of the opioid epidemic and other substance abuse on current and future health, productivity, and public healthcare spending?

What do we know about the impact of stress on the health and productivity of adults and their offspring?

How does poverty affect childhood development and subsequent labor quality? What rates of return might be earned on investments in environmental improvements (reducing lead, other pollutants) or on expanding access to healthcare? What is the relative return of investing public resources in the young vs. the old, especially compared to current practice? How does where people live affect their economic outcomes?

How does where people live affect their economic outcomes?

What role do race, ethnicity, family composition, culture, and other factors play in the propensity of Americans to move from one place to another to improve their economic prospects? Does geographic sorting and reluctance to move become a self-perpetuating driver of inequality, and how much do other disparities flow from that?

In what ways does the place in which a child grows up matter to outcomes, and does it matter differently to children of different races and ethnicities?

States vary widely in their public sector philosophies, which is reflected in their approach to and spending on education: how does that affect children of different racial/ethnic groups? Demographic change is happening in different regions at different speeds, and the industrial structure of regions vary: Does that matter?

To what extent do public policies encourage or discourage geographical mobility?

How important is immigration to long-run economic growth and fiscal sustainability in the U.S.?

How much does the volume and type of immigration (e.g., family reunification vs. attracting high skilled workers) matter for economic growth and financial sustainability?

How much does immigration matter to the age distribution of the US population in decades to come?

What are the important determinants of the supply of potential immigrants in the future?

Will the US remain an attractive place for immigrants relative to conditions in home countries and other potential places to which they might immigrate?
How do family structure and culture influence labor force participation and, thus, the economic and fiscal outlook?

- Does marriage matter? Does marriage matter to labor force participation rates of young men? Are patterns of child and elder caregiving different among different ethnic and racial groups and, if so, so what? How much do changes in household composition and marriage patterns (as opposed to other characteristics) drive observed inequality?
- What are the determinants of fertility, how do fertility rates different among segments of the population, and what are the implications? The role of religion and religious institutions?

What are the implications for individual wellbeing and long-term economic growth of the wide gaps in wealth across race and ethnicity, and across marital status, household composition, and educational attainment?

- What is happening to savings and wealth by race and ethnicity over time?
- How do gaps in wealth affect labor force attachment, wages, mobility?
- How are different age groups preparing for retirement and how does retirement readiness vary by race, ethnicity, and marital status? What roles do social supports (e.g., Social Security) play in retirement readiness for different groups?
- Does saving behavior differ across groups, and if so, as the population changes, what are the implications for retirement adequacy and/or national saving? Are there incentives or policy changes that would alter observed differences?
- How does the growing burden of student debt affect saving during the working lives, both among those who finish college and those who do not? How does student debt burden affect retirement adequacy?

What are the economic and political implications of increasing population diversity for long-run fiscal policy?

- Does an aging society require higher taxes, public transfers or debt? Could such redistributions of resources within and across generations be accomplished in ways that are “fair” to future generations, especially given the changes in demographics?
- Is there the potential for more or less fiscal space when demographic changes are taken into account?
- What is likely to happen to differences in life expectancy across groups over time, and what are the implications of health status and life expectancy disparities for Medicare and Social Security reform? What do differences in life expectancy suggest for changes to eligibility ages for retirement and health programs?
- What are the political implications of a country in which older whites are a minority? What is likely to happen to support for entitlements, for taxes? What are the implications of the changing demographics for political polarization?