

2022 Best Fieldwork Award

Kaustav Chakrabarti of Ashoka University, India, for his dissertation, from Brown University, entitled “Underground Governance: Rules-Based Order by Armed Groups in Northeast India.” Chakrabarti conducted a total of 254 in-depth interviews over 11 months of immersive fieldwork in order to understand the intricacies of rebel governance without territorial control. The geographical breadth of these interviews deserves mention: the majority of interviews took place in 10 districts across the states of Nagaland, Mizoram, and Manipur, and 9 of these districts are designated as active conflict zones. Apart from interviewing rebel leaders, foot soldiers, bureaucrats and policemen, Chakrabarti also made use of national and personal archives to cross-reference information gathered through the interviews in a systematic way. The committee was particularly impressed with Chakrabarti’s lengthy discussion of how he selected respondents, handled discrepancies in interview data, his mitigation strategies, and his learning of best interview practices “on the job.” The resulting dissertation is elegantly written and allows the reader to take a deep-dive into the workings of rebel governance.

Honorable mentions:

Eitan Paul, PhD candidate at the University of Michigan, conducted 142 Indonesian-language interviews over the span of 18 months of fieldwork in Indonesia to study the effectiveness of fiscal decentralization policies with community participation requirements in improving the quality of citizen participation and the provision of local public goods. The committee was impressed by the effort Paul put forth to obtain access to these communities, both from Indonesian bureaucracies and his home institution during the COVID-19 pandemic. The village-level administrative data that Paul was able to collect as a result of his fieldwork is also very admirable.

Our second honorable mention, Carolyn Barnett, PhD candidate at Princeton, conducted 80 interviews over the course of 12 months in Morocco, studying the disconnect between legal advances for women’s rights and improvements in gender equality. The committee was impressed with Barnett’s linguistic breadth, as she conducted these interviews in three different languages (Arabic, French, and English). Barnett also conducted 12 focus groups in five Moroccan cities with 98 participants, demonstrating her commitment to methodological rigor.

Prize committee: Alexis Lerner (US Naval Academy), Michelle Weitzel (Graduate Institute of Geneva), and Mashail Malik (Chair) (Harvard University)