

TORSHA CHAKRAVORTY

PhD candidate, UC San Diego
Department of Economics
Pronouns: She/Her/Hers

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EDUCATION

PhD in Economics, University of California San Diego	<i>Sept. 2021-June 2027 (expected)</i>
Committee: Paul Niehaus (Chair), Julie Cullen, Karthik Muralidharan, Samuel Bazzi, Prashant Bharadwaj	
M.A. Economics, Madras School of Economics	<i>2017-2019</i>
B.Sc. Economics, University of Calcutta	<i>2014-2017</i>

AREAS OF INTEREST

Primary: Development economics, Public economics
Secondary: Applied econometrics

SELECT WORK-IN-PROGRESS

Building State Capacity in Stages: Brokers in Public Service Delivery
(with Parminder Pal Singh Sandhu, IAS)

- Job Market Paper
- Winner of Walter Heller Memorial Prize (best 3rd year paper award)

Citizens need to establish eligibility for public benefits, and many pay private agents (brokers) to help obtain them. We study how this broker market responds when the government makes it easier to apply directly. A staffing reform in a large Indian state added workers who help submit applications, while leaving approving officials unchanged. Using pre-existing differences in district exposure to the reform, we find that a 1 percent staffing increase raises broker-mediated applications by 1.7 percent, compared to 1.1 percent for direct applications, and induces broker entry. Yet direct applications become faster, reducing brokers' average speed advantage. These patterns rule out a model where public workers purely substitute for brokers and, under maintained assumptions, one where brokers only obtain priority from approvers. A model where public workers make brokers more productive can explain joint results. Our findings highlight the role of informal markets in building state capacity.

Cost of access: Middlemen rents in obtaining identity certificates

I investigate price discrimination, administrative friction, and rent-seeking in informal brokerage networks for public service delivery. Using an audit experiment with mystery shoppers in Punjab, India, I measure how third-party brokers quote prices and completion times for official Scheduled Caste (SC) identity certificates. I experimentally vary three dimensions across paired broker visits: applicant document completeness (full paperwork versus missing ancestral caste records), service urgency (standard timeline versus an expedited request), and shopper gender. Additionally, I elicit broker narratives regarding official state-run service centers (Sewa Kendras) to test whether intermediaries strategically discredit formal channels.

Highways & Innovation: Evidence from India
(with Ishani Chatterjee)

We study whether transport infrastructure affects the spatial distribution of innovation in India. Districts gaining greater access to the national highway network experience increased patenting, alongside growth in higher-education institutions and firm size. We investigate whether improved connectivity raises local innovation directly or facilitates the spatial diffusion of economic activity and knowledge.

SELECT SEMINAR PRESENTATIONS

The Northeastern Universities Development Consortium (NEUDC) Cornell University	<i>Nov 2026 (upcoming)</i>
BEDI, Labor and Development Workshop University of Pittsburgh	<i>May 2026</i>
RIDGE/LACEA-PEG Economics Workshop on Political Economy University of West Indies, Cave Hill, Barbados	<i>May 2026</i>
35th Annual Conference on Contemporary Issues in Development Economics, Jadavpur University, Kolkata	<i>Jan. 2026</i>
20th Annual Conference on Economic Growth and Development Indian Statistical Institute, Delhi	<i>Dec. 2025</i>
8th Southern California Graduate Conference in Applied Economics University of California Los Angeles	<i>Aug. 2025</i>
Graduate Research Workshop University of California San Diego	<i>Apr. 2026, Nov. 2025, Feb. 2025</i>

AWARDS, GRANTS, AND HONORS

21st Century India Center Student Research Grant	<i>2023-2024, 2026</i>
Walter P. Heller Memorial Prize (Best 3rd Year Paper)	<i>2024</i>
UCSD Winter Travel and Research Grant	<i>2023-2024</i>
UCSD Graduate Summer Research Fellowship	<i>2022-2023</i>

METHODS AND COMPUTING

Programming: R, Stata, Python (NumPy, pandas), SQL, Microsoft Excel

Methods: Applied econometrics; causal inference; instrumental variables and shift-share designs; panel and event-study methods; machine learning; analysis of large-scale administrative and transaction data; computational and numerical methods.

WORK EXPERIENCE

Associate Intern, Analysis Group

Jun.–Aug. 2025

Worked on an antitrust class action lawsuit. Reconstructed and analyzed multiple datasets using transaction-level observations. I identified misspecification in the opposing party's econometric pricing model and worked with economists and attorneys to assess its implications for the damages analysis.

Research Associate, Indian School of Business

Jan. 2020 – May 2021

Conducted quantitative research on public service delivery and institutional design. Developed research partnerships with senior government officials and established a confidential data-sharing agreement between UC San Diego and an Indian state government, providing administrative data for my current and future research.

Analytics Consultant, Data Science & AI Optimization Team, [24]7.ai

Jun. 2019 – Dec. 2019

Worked at the Data Science & AI Optimization Team. I designed predictive algorithms (using logit models and other classification techniques) for customer behavior and automated decision systems.

Business Forecasting Intern, Anheuser Busch InBev

May 2018 – Jul. 2018

Worked primarily in the Industry Forecasting team. I collaborated with strategy and marketing teams to build predictive models for beer sales in Argentina and France.

PAST TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Introduction to Social Data Analytics

Instructor of Record in SU26

Machine Learning in Economics & Business Forecasting

TA in Wl25, S325, Wl26

Undergraduate Econometrics

TA in Wl23, SP23, FA23

Economics of Discrimination

TA in S122, Wl23

Cities & Inequality

TA in S123

REFERENCES

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