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month ago many of us gathered once again for the annual APSA meeting, this time in San Francisco enjoying record high temperatures. Global warming? Well, in any case it was hot... My impression is that the discussion about increasing rigor in political science, the pros and cons of experiments, and conditions of causal inference continued to be intense during this year’s APSA meeting, and so it has been in this newsletter lately.

I am therefore particularly happy that we can feature this issue’s symposium on field research rigor, ethics, and training. We should recognize that many (I would probably suggest “most”) of our most significant theories in comparative politics in general, and not the least in comparative democratization, come from ingenious field work and the accumulation of various forms of “thick” or “in-depth” knowledge. Field work comes in many shapes and forms, naturally, and can result in both quantitative and qualitative data. Each of these broad categories contains another set of multiple options with distinct challenges and requirements. But doing research in the field, especially in less familiar and sometimes authoritarian contexts, prompts specific issues relating to ethics, rigor, and reproducibility/intersubjectivity.

In view of the current discussion, part of them related to the DA-RT initiative, I therefore think the current issue is particularly timely. I am very happy that co-guest editors, Allen Hicken, Meredith L. Weiss and Erik M. Kuhonta approach us and suggested this issue. Happy reading.
INTRO
Meredith L. Weiss, University at Albany, SUNY
Allen Hicken, University of Michigan
Erik Martinez Kuhonta, McGill University

The question of how “area studies” fits with the discipline of Political Science is an evergreen one in the discipline. Champions of the need for region-specific contextual knowledge within the discipline of political science periodically duke it out with critics who emphasize the costs and limits of area-focused work. This contest can leave new scholars uncertain of where they fit or what their prospects are. Regardless, area studies has not vanished as an orientation; indeed, the study of regions such as Southeast Asia is thriving in political science. Even so, PhD students and early-career political scientists find themselves endlessly reinventing wheels, for two main reasons.

First, while increasing attention to methodological training and diversity in Political Science in the US since around 2000 has resulted in a more carefully developed methods “core” for many or most PhD-granting departments, including (and often requiring) a combination of quantitative, qualitative, formal, experimental, and interpretive methods, that training still rarely extends to field research methods. In consequence, students keen to include a substantial in-country component to their research must now master ever more refined and varied “disciplinary” approaches and tools, generally including more coursework than previously. The cost of this additional time and investment in methods training is that they are then often left on their own to sort out how to conduct fieldwork and to determine where such research fits within a cluttered methodological or epistemological toolbox. Without university-based training, students turn to informal conversations with peers or advisors, “received wisdom,” and trial and error, or at best, short courses or modules at American Political Science Association (APSA) annual meetings and summer methods institutes, in an attempt to learn the ins and outs of successful field research.

In the same vein, graduate students in the US and elsewhere now incorporate training in how to gain approval for research involving human subjects. However, at least in the US, such training tends to be highly generic, offering minimal guidance for the actual dilemmas students are likely to face in the field: the thorny issues of ethics, security (personal and of informants), and appropriateness specific to research across the full range of countries. These dilemmas are all the more germane for students working in developing-country and/or illiberal or socio-politically unstable contexts, which pose particular challenges to field researchers. Even were field-research training more readily accessible, most of its practitioners among United States-based practitioners, at least, focus on the US itself (by far the largest share) and Western Europe; among developing or non-democratic countries, only China, Russia, and Argentina break the top-ten list of field research locations in a recent survey of political scientists.1 Germane to the discussion that follows: no country in Southeast Asia makes even the list of the top forty such sites,2 nor is any Southeast Asian language (with the partial exception of Mandarin) among the top twenty non-English languages used in US-based political scientists’ field research projects.3

Second, some of the doyens of the discipline give aspiring area specialists decidedly mixed messages regarding the prudence of the research they aim to pursue. Well-meaning advisors sometimes caution students that focusing on any one country or region may not pass muster with hiring committees (regardless of how many years’ language training and more that acquiring such expertise entailed), or urge quantitative or experimental approaches as more efficient and “marketable” than the more time-consuming, sometimes ethnographic approaches common to area studies. A concerned graduate student might survey the discipline and note that area specialists continue to secure tenure-track positions in Political Science ... yet such evidence may be cold comfort to one first embarking on a career and rightly nervous at the prospect of making the job search any more difficult than necessary.

In light of these lacunae and challenges, we three, all Southeast Asia-focused political scientists, decided to pull together a team of early-career peers to move toward at least starting to fill the gap. All three of us have written books that reflect engagement with both discipline and region, and have each conducted significant field research.4 These early-career scholars are also

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2. Ibid.: 55.
3. Ibid.: 66.
engaged with research that seeks to combine that delicate balance between discipline and region. Recognizing that the field research experience may be vastly different for younger, unknown, and/or inexperienced researchers than for those with significant prior experience, connections, and/or resources we organized a panel of doctoral students and recent PhDs to present a short course at the 2016 APSA annual meeting. These presentations where then edited for this symposium. Generous support from the APSA Edward Artinian Fund for Publishing allowed us to hold a workshop among the panelists and exchange several drafts of the papers, both before and after the short course.

We see the essays here as falling into three key, overlapping areas: field research logistics, field research ethics and challenges, and how to build a career involving and capitalizing upon field research experience. The authors gathered here draw from their own experience, extrapolating from that experience or situating it within larger frameworks. The overarching goal, though, is to offer pragmatic, real-world, well-grounded advice. The contributors address many similar issues, but from diverse perspectives and with sometimes varying recommendations. While our primary audience is graduate students (and their advisers) and early-career researchers, academic or otherwise, we expect these ideas to be germane not only to Southeast Asianists or those working in developing and/or non-democratic contexts. Given the institutional, regime, and social diversity that a region like Southeast Asia provides, the insights generated by these essays should be relevant to political scientists across regions and issue-areas.

**Field Research Logistics**

How does one go about planning for field research? What are the challenges and obstacles a new researcher is likely to encounter? Working out the nuts-and-bolts of conducting field research can seem a daunting challenge. From acquiring required visas and clearance, to securing interviews and safeguarding data, to locating and accessing archives and other data sources, to determining how long to spend in situ, field researchers face a number of decisions—many of which must be made long before setting foot in a field site. Three of our authors tackle questions related to field research logistics.

Aries Arugay focuses on “surgical strike” field research—research composed of a series of short trips (one to three months) to multiple field sites. Drawing on field work experiences in the Philippines, Thailand, and Latin America, he notes that this kind of field research can be costly both in terms of time and resources. To be successful, researchers should focus on a narrow set of well-defined goals and carefully plan so as to maximize experience and learning along the way. Specifically, he recommends researchers begin with the field site with which they are most familiar in order to pilot their research strategy, hone their questions and tools, and uncover unexpected challenges or opportunities. Thoughtful sequencing of field work can reduce the learning curve involved in later field work visits. Arugay also notes that field researchers need to be prepared to improvise and adapt, and should approach their field research as a down payment on a long-term investment.

Very often field work involves interviews. Alysson Oakley tackles the logistical and practical challenges to conducting interviews—from getting access to informants, to deciding what questions to ask, to dealing with distractions during an interview. Every researcher should begin by carefully thinking through what information is actually needed, and who is in the best position to provide that information. A common, but avoidable misstep, is wasting precious access to a contact with specialized information by asking questions that many others could answer. She recommends researchers begin with background interviews with outside observers (academics and journalists), before moving on to actors directly involved with or who have firsthand knowledge about the relevant issues. She also recommends working through facilitators or brokers to help researchers gain access to some elite and non-elite targets.

Finally, Diana Kim draws on her experience doing archival research in Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar, the UK, and France to discuss three questions related to archival research. First, where to start? Large and oft-used archives are generally easy to access and navigate, while smaller, local archives are more likely to have novel materials but are generally harder and more costly to access. Second, how does one manage working in multiple archives? Kim recommends asking staff for help, using a straightforward note-taking system, and using a “circle itinerary.” Third, who to talk to in the archives? Remember, Kim advises, that the staff and archivists can be key informants, intermediaries and interlocutors.

**Field Work Ethics & Challenges**

While field research in any context poses challenges, these hurdles are higher where academic researchers are an uncommon sight (and where fewer are thus available to share their experiences with newcomers); where governments are unstable or repressive; where dimensions of one’s
own identity put a researcher in a disfavored position; where the central questions behind one's research are especially sensitive; or where one has normative commitments that might compromise objectivity. Any or all of these issues, in combination or singly, are likely to apply at some point to virtually any political scientist conducting field research in Southeast Asia.

Some of these issues emerge in other essays in this symposium, but two in particular merit focused attention: conducting field research in conflict zones and researching while female in Southeast Asia. Shane Barter draws on his experience working in Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines to offer concrete suggestions for how to minimize harm both to oneself and to members of the local population with whom a researcher interacts when in conflict zones. He recommends a clear sense of perspective, careful cultivation of networks and other resources, a strategy for securing research clearance (from both the state and local rebel groups), easing into the research, and interviewing across a range of informants. He offers, too, practical suggestions for dealing with the specific risks and ethical dilemmas such research presents.

Sarah Shair-Rosenfeld homes in on issues of identity: the specific challenges for fieldwork facing women, members of ethnic minority groups, and others from non-majority categories. Extrapolating from her research in Indonesia as a "young, female, mixed race/ambiguously non-white" doctoral student, she suggests such researchers might brace for a degree of frustration and misrepresentation, but also prepare themselves and consider minor prevarication, so as to minimize those issues. Although the specific reception for women, those who are unmarried and are childless, or members of specific identity groups will vary by community and location, her suggestions for managing expectations, grappling with privilege, and sustaining one's reputation as a competent—and specifically female—scholar are broadly germane.

Building a Career
One of the significant advantages of fieldwork is that it provides a foundation for contacts and access that can in the long-run be useful for one's career. By spending time in the field, a scholar can systematically develop an intellectual network that may generate or clarify conceptual knowledge, empirical data, up-to-date information on current events, and many other resources that may aid the scholar's future projects or even indirectly, help one's job prospects. A central aspect of the fieldwork experience is that it helps define a scholar's identity as embedded in a network of academics with deep knowledge of the region. While PhD training within the university ensures that the discipline will always be at the forefront in one's career, fieldwork provides the basis for a scholarly identity rooted in the region that is just as important for any researcher for whom area studies credibility and legitimacy are also vital.

Paul Schuler looks at how consulting in the field can be useful for one's career. Consulting with organizations in the field has the potential to provide access to data; increase one's contacts, including increasing the chance of getting difficult interviews through an expanded network; generate resources for projects; and provide credibility. At the same time, Schuler cautions that one should not leap at just any chance to engage in consulting, but should weigh opportunity costs in terms of time away from one's own dissertation project. Furthermore, one's credibility and independence as a researcher can be undermined in the field if one is not careful of the broader repercussions of being associated with a specific organization. Whether that organization promotes democracy or supports a dictatorship can affect the researcher's prospects for field access and intellectual legitimacy.

Kai Ostwald addresses the job market and its relationship to fieldwork. What he finds is that although political science departments in North America tend not to advertise for Southeast Asianists specifically, this does not mean that Southeast Asia-oriented political scientists have not gotten jobs at major research universities. Ostwald suggests that the key issue that young scholars should focus on is developing a dissertation project that effectively combines a broad theoretical question with a regional focus. Fieldwork provides the foundation for that regional focus, as well as a network of scholars and analysts who can provide not just knowledge but contacts that will be useful in one's career. Crucially, fieldwork allows a scholar to become rooted in a network of area studies that helps define a scholar's identity and credibility. Furthermore, publications in area studies journals or policy journals that are regionally based may also be useful for job applications in universities with public policy schools or at policy institutes.

We hope these reflections and tips facilitate high-quality research, reassure anxious scholars as they embark on field research, and perhaps most importantly, spur ongoing consideration and discussion.
In 2013, I wrote a short piece for a blog created by Filipino scholars doing graduate studies abroad. I wrote about the challenges related to doing dissertation fieldwork in multiple countries, whether at home (the Philippines), another Southeast Asian country (Thailand), or in my two Latin American cases (Bolivia and Venezuela). In a nutshell, my own field research experience in different settings involved several calibrated adjustments depending on context, familiarity, overall purpose of my case studies, and even logistics. This paper outlines the adjustments I made with the goal of simultaneously maintaining disciplined application of my data collection strategies as well as the flexibility essential in good fieldwork. I will also highlight unique aspects of doing field research in Southeast Asia, a region I consider to be both too familiar at times but in other circumstances strange.

Let me first provide a caveat. This memo could be more useful to researchers planning to conduct what could be described as the lean and mean fieldwork type. This entails doing field research in a relatively short period of time (usually one to three months), in either single trip or multiple trips. Known also as a surgical strike kind of field research, this modality focuses “tightly on a set of well-defined goals” and seeks to appreciate the breadth of case knowledge more than its depth. This differs from most comparative political research projects that usually involve one to two field sites, conducted over a longer period of time. This “expansive sojourn” typically has more open-ended research questions and employs several “soaking and poking” data gathering strategies.

This type of fieldwork relies less on ethnographic methods and an inductive research strategy. My research design entailed gathering different perspectives on highly contentious political events that comprised constitutional crises, regime change, and even violent upheaval in four young democracies. I benefitted from a lot of secondary material that provided extensive scholarly and official accounts about my cases. Fieldwork filled the gaps in my data in the form of mainly hard-to-find newspapers and books in the local language unavailable to libraries in the United States, but most importantly, my trips to my field sites included gathering primary data in the form of interviews with those who directly participated in or were knowledgeable about these events. I conducted a total of sixty elite interviews with former presidents, politicians, military officials, bureaucrats, activists, journalists, and scholars. The entire fieldwork was costly since it entailed a total of fourteen months in in four countries, five cities, and four languages. The logistics proved challenging, from securing ethical research protocol approval, to securing visas as well as finding suitable lodging and most importantly, getting the necessary financial resources to carry out fieldwork.

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This short discussion has three main points. First, field research in multiple sites can be efficiently done through purposive sequencing. This entails going to the most familiar field site or country first where one has a good grasp of background knowledge and political context as well as an extensive network and command of the local language before proceeding to areas where one has less information and fewer contacts and research tools. Second, daily encounters in the field demand improvisation and quick reaction time that usually means going outside and beyond well-thought fieldwork plans. Losing some control in implementing the research design and data collection framework can lead to new discoveries, improvement of causal arguments, and helpful insights. Finally, given the existing state of information and communication technologies, fieldwork in Southeast Asia and beyond should be appreciated as not only “getting one’s hands dirty” but also an opportunity to make meaningful connections, establish networks, and lay the foundations for continuous engagement with people, groups, and institutions in the future.

Doing fieldwork as a local and an outsider: The value of sequencing

The definition of what is comfortably familiar and disturbingly strange totally depends on the researcher. It is central to mapping one’s fieldwork terrain and accounts as helpful hints in planning research trips. As a Southeast Asian who resided (and remains a resident) in the region, is native speaker of one of its languages, and has previous field research experience, it seemed obvious what should be familiar among my four country cases. As a “local” of the Philippines, it makes perfect sense for me to visit that field site first. It is also the least challenging in terms of logistics and preparations. Knowledge of context, my existing network of contacts, easy access to key informants and newspaper archives, and an excellent institutional affiliation are all signals of a manageable fieldwork stint. I first did fieldwork in my home country


with a different but related purpose: to fine tune my theory and causal arguments. The Philippines became my prototypical case where I pilot-tested my fieldwork plan, my interview guide, and the structure of my field notes. In other words, the eventual learning curves for my other three cases became relatively shorter because I sequenced my fieldwork in the order of familiarity. By the time I was in my fourth case study, I knew more or less what to look for, what questions to ask, where to go for the data I needed, and the appropriate candidates for interlocutors and key informants. By treating my “home” as a template, I saved precious time and resources devoted to my other three cases.

How did I conduct fieldwork with my “stranger” countries? A pre-dissertation probe in Thailand and attending a conference were ways to bridge the knowledge gap with considerable cost efficiency. Its proximity to the Philippines helped and my research contacts were developed during these short visits.

My graduate coursework in Latin American politics helped me with gaining familiarity with my two other cases. Apart from this, staying with a local family in Bolivia and Venezuela was a tremendous help. I had many dinner conversations about local politics, history, culture, colloquial terms, proper conduct, and even research contacts through my host families. While improving my language proficiency, the local stays allowed me to immerse myself in these stranger field sites. I also benefitted from the wealth of contacts provided by my dissertation committee as well as university faculty who are from these countries or ones who previously did field research in these places. Conferences were also opportunities to network, get tips from those who have treaded the same path, and identify strategic contact persons. From my experience, spending time networking at the Latin American Studies Association annual meeting bridged the gap between familiar Southeast Asia and strange Latin America. In a span of four days, I met US-based and local scholars from Bolivia and Venezuela and even met diplomats from these countries who aided my visa application. This fortuitous occasion is not for every researcher but the lesson here is to grab every opportunity to get more familiar with the countries you are visiting.

However, starting out with the most familiar case also revealed difficulties of doing fieldwork in your home country. Surprising as it may sound, there is a downside to having too much familiarity. For example, it was difficult to secure interviews with some elites given my local status, something in which foreign researchers might have an advantage. Specifically, it was especially hard for me to interview high-level Filipino politicians and bureaucrats while I observed that the same personalities willingly provided interviews to foreign scholars. This only revealed the indeterminacy that characterizes field research, often due to factors beyond a researcher’s control.

Another challenge is maintaining one’s analytical distance from one’s most familiar fieldwork terrain given the personal and professional stakes involved. This proved to be not that
easy given the extent of my background knowledge about the Philippines. I can immediately tell if my interviewees are telling half-truths, inaccurate details, or wrong facts. I made sure I confirmed their claims with other sources of information such as documents, newspaper coverage, and even my other interviews. In the end, my fieldwork at home helped me be more alert in the conduct of these interviews and more discerning about the interview data I collected from my other cases.

Another advantage of sequencing fieldwork is the fact that I became more efficient in data collection. By the time I was doing fieldwork for my Latin American cases, I had experience in prioritizing which data needed to be gathered given my limited time in the field. Poll data and newspaper articles became secondary to key informant interviews since the former can be acquired even when I am no longer in the field. I also learned to prioritize which questions I needed to ask in person per interviewee given that I was able to ask them more questions via phone and/or email. This proved helpful when I was organizing my interview data.

Looking back, I realized that it is nearly impossible to approach multiple cases with equidistant and consistent familiarity or strangeness, despite the strict objectivity and rigor social science would ideally entail. Researchers must nevertheless aim for optimal outcomes but remain sober enough to accept that they should expect less and prepare for contingencies through consistent improvisation. Field researchers can never treat their cases with proportionality but they can make every effort to narrow gaps with familiarity and contextual knowledge.

This is one essential advantage of doing comparative political research.

**Iterating improvisation: Fieldwork pivots**

In pursuing a comparative project, I was implementing iteration in drafting fieldwork plans and data collection strategies across my four cases. One operative principle that guided my fieldwork was the need to quickly improvise and adapt to situations. Called flexible discipline, it includes the careful preparation, planning, and organization of fieldwork, bearing in mind overall goals, anticipating possible obstacles, and systematically tracking progress. It advises the researcher to allow time, room, and energy for adaptation to unexpected challenges, inevitable hurdles, and unforeseen opportunities.

From my experience, hurdles include breaking the glass ceiling of data access. The choice of research interlocutors was critical in all my field visits. These research gatekeepers included local scholars, former bureaucrats, and staff of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). These are key informants themselves but also provide a wealth of contacts. I found that the value of local scholars partly was a function of how that society appreciated their role in the political scene. In addition, while universities are often seen as default institutional affiliations for most researchers, they may also choose think-tanks and international NGOs. One however must be aware that institutions could have political leanings or reputations that could jeopardize one’s research. I realized this particularly in highly polarized societies such as Thailand and Venezuela. One measure I implemented is to sometimes just use my affiliation as a doctoral student in the US when introducing myself to my key informants rather than being a visiting researcher of a local organization or university.

Unexpected challenges could come from strictly following research protocol such as the use of formality in approaching people. In many countries, informal norms are sometimes more effective in eliciting quick responses. The use of formal letters and email did not work across all my field sites, particularly in Southeast Asia. I adjusted by attempting to meet people in public events like local conferences, book launches, university seminars, protest demonstrations, and other venues. In these events, they would immediately agree for an interview on the spot. I realized that I was doing the kind of work often attributed to journalists. I learned to keep in mind a couple of research questions which I consider to be topmost priority for a particular key informant. The lesson I learned here is that not all interviews need to be the sit-down 45-60 minute long conversations I originally planned and for which I thought would willingly give you their time. Given the hectic schedule of my resource persons, I had to improvise by identifying critical questions that I prioritized for each of them. These “blitzkrieg interviews” would also entail equally quick note-taking skills and due diligence in writing post-interview field notes immediately.

Improvisation means grabbing every opportunity to get data. This could be in the form of spontaneous local trips to meet important people. In Bolivia, I decided to fly to another city (Cochabamba) when a key informant facilitated my interview with a very eminent social movement leader who

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3. I made sure to establish contacts and good rapport, for example, with the institutions that have the data I needed so I could contact them by phone or email after I departed the field site.

4. Kapieszewski et al., *Field Research in Political Science.*

5. For example, it was very difficult to get responses from my Thai and Bolivian key informants via email. While it was awkward to directly call them via phone, I realized that this was the more acceptable way of communication with political elites and scholars in these countries.
rarely gave access to researchers. Given the travel time that is required, I had to make a critical decision of foregoing about four interviews in exchange for that one interview. I did not regret the decision since in the end, it was the quality of the data that mattered for my project rather than quantity. But I also made sure that I apprised my dissertation committee before I executed all these pivots or changes.

Finally, I improvised by being resourceful in securing funding for my fieldwork. The time and effort for grant applications should be considered by any researcher in one’s fieldwork plan, particularly in the preparatory phase. While big grants are ideal, these have become highly competitive and failing to secure them is a major disappointment. In my case, there was no big enough grant that could cover expenses to all my four case countries. I relied on “big enough” grants that covered one to two countries. Some of them entailed doing side-research projects that complemented my dissertation topic since not all grant-giving bodies allow the researcher complete flexibility to propose any research topic. Some grants also required delivering public talks or seminars, which could be ways to solicit feedback and make more connections. The lesson that could be derived here is to take advantage of all grant opportunities, be diligent in searching for grants, be creative in drafting grant proposals, and exhaust all possible sources of funding, including grants given by the country where you will conduct fieldwork.

Fieldwork as the gateway to continuous engagement
Field research should not be treated as a one-shot deal of data collection. On the contrary, it is better viewed as an opportunity to open the gates for continuous engagement and discovery of not just one’s research topic but planned and for which I thought would willingly give will invest more time and attention in the future. Asfieldwork can be highly stressful, given time, money, and other constraints, there is a need to balance the overriding goal of data collection with the personal realities faced by the researcher. In my case, spending my Sundays on purely non-research related things was helpful. This entailed devoting time to exploring my field site, talking to locals and even tourists, going to the market, and doing recreational activities. I also expanded and developed my relations with my host families, contacts, and interlocutors. Our lines of communication remain open until today.

Iteration in this process also meant maintaining contact with interlocutors, key informants, host families, and friends made throughout the journey. While fieldwork in the short-term was primarily about data collection for a research project, it can be less stressful and more fulfilling if it is treated as the chance to develop networks for future engagement. I did several “follow-up” interviews mainly through email with some of my contacts and updated them on the status of my research project. In this sense, the fieldwork process at the very least becomes desirable and even an enriching outcome beneficial to the researcher’s professional and personal growth. Ideally, continuous engagement with your contacts in the field can lead to mutually beneficial outcomes. This is where the critical difference in being social scientists lies – our subjects are not simply sources of information nor do they remain as such after we have used them for our purposes. Consciously or not, the researcher becomes inevitably tied to his fieldwork space in a myriad of social relations but also is concerned for the people of the case countries he studies. This does not necessarily imply a diminution of analytical objectivity but a complication that results from “getting one’s hands dirty”.

Fieldwork in multiple sites entails calibrated adjustments, improvisations, and resourcefulness that often keeps researchers off-guard. It relies on one’s intellectual prowess but also on being socially savvy, adaptive, and even recognizing the role of luck. It requires a considerable level of flexibility from pre-conceived and even well-thought-out work plans with an eye for what is truly the goal of fieldwork. Part of it is about as about getting out there, wherever there is, and becoming part of what is going on and what you are researching. It is about what Geertz called “being there”.

There is never enough time or money for fieldwork. Your practical limitations necessarily affect your field research ambitions, which in turn affect your research, from the question to the result. One of the main challenges is to make do with what you have, whilst maintaining the quality and relevance of your project. Critical to this is establishing early on what your logistical parameters are and how they affect your research.

Interviewing adds its own logistical twist. In an ideal world, setting up and conducting interviews would go something like this:

1. Obtain contact information from colleague or public search
2. Send communication to target interviewee or administrative assistant
3. Obtain interview time and location
4. Show up on time and enjoy productive discussion in conducive setting

In many places in the real world, setting up and conducting interviews often looks more like this:

1. No public data: find someone who knows someone who can access target interviewee
2. Meet with Contact and gain interest and trust
3. Wait for Contact to communicate with Target and gain Target’s interest
4. Continue to network with Contact to encourage set-up of interview time with Target

1. Obtain tentative interview time and location
2. Adapt to new interview time and location
3. Show up early and wait up to several hours
4. Interview in the midst of interruptions, location changes, formality, audience, noise

Interviewing as part of field research is valuable and can be quite fun. But, accessing interviewees, setting up interview times, managing interview settings, and following up appropriately to ensure future access all add their perplexing logistical twists and data challenges.
Akiko Oakley

These challenges in turn affect not only your experience undertaking field work more generally, but the data you ultimately gather, as well as the ethics and methodological limitations resulting from how you go about collecting them. In this article, I will suggest why you would want to work through facilitators and brokers to gain access to some elite and non-elite interview targets; provide practical advice on how to do so; and discuss special challenges associated with researching via informal connections. The information holds equally for qualitative and quantitative research, though will be most useful for those undertaking in-depth interviewing.

Deciding whom to interview: What do you need to know?

Before you decide whom to target, first decide what you need to know. The more challenging the target, the more time it will take to access the interviewee physically (in terms of contacting and scheduling) and figuratively (in terms of gaining sufficient trust and access).

Background information: Do not waste the time of a case actor with background information questions. If the information is not available elsewhere, then draw up a list of key observers who are relatively easy to access and accustomed to meeting with researchers, such as academics or journalists.

Non-actor-specific case information: This is information not available elsewhere, but about which most actors in a case can inform you. For example, one of many political party members can recount a critical discussion from a recent party meeting that was not covered by the media. This person is highly substitutable from an interview point of view.

Actor-specific case information: This is information that only a specific person knows. This can be either a fact (like a description of the lobbying process the case actor had to go through) or an opinion specific to the case actor’s role or position. This is more challenging logistically, because this person is difficult to substitute.

Non-sensitive information: This is information that an interviewee can freely talk about with no concerns about security or confidentiality. This person is mostly challenging from a physical access point of view: how can you get her contact information and get on her calendar?

Sensitive information: Sensitive or proprietary information is information that requires more than average trust, for example, a strategy to bring down a competitor, details about illegal or publicly disapproved activities, or a personal opinion about a delicate matter. What is considered sensitive can be relative: the interviewee may be a more suspicious or cautious person, and how you as an interviewer are perceived can affect whether the information is considered to be sensitive. In such circumstances, you need to gain access physically in terms of getting inked into the interviewee’s schedule, and figuratively in terms of gaining their interest and confidence in you to speak as freely as possible. This is very challenging, and I encourage you to really consider how much sensitive information you really need.

I advise you to begin with background interviews with the observers and then move on to the case actors: from non-actor specific to actor specific, and from non-sensitive to sensitive. Taking this sequence will: (a) give you a greater understanding of your case to inform your subsequent interviews; (b) give you access to a pool of people who have met you, who are hopefully supportive of your research project.

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and who might be amenable to serving as facilitators or brokers for the more sensitive and actor-specific interviews.

**Gaining access to interview targets: Using facilitators and brokers**

Gaining access to any interviewee can be challenging. There are two main methods to approaching your targets: the formal route and the informal route. There is no fast rule on which route you take: consider the advantages and disadvantages for each of your interview targets depending on your information needs and their degree of access challenge.

Formal route: Going through the formal route generally entails sending a formal request (email, mail, hand delivery, telephone). The benefits of this route are that the interviewee understands clearly upfront that you are a researcher, provides preliminary informed consent by agreeing to the interview (consent still needs to be properly acquired), often is willing to be recorded, and likely agrees to a time within normal business hours and at a location conducive to an interview. There are drawbacks: your request may be ignored or substantially delayed, you may only get a short amount of time (for example, 15 minutes with a minister is considered generous), and you may not be trusted and so may only hear standard talking points or normative accounts. Hopefully most of your interviews can be accessed via a formal process. Generally, the formal route is not appropriate if you need sensitive information, or if you are trying to access challenging elite targets. For such circumstances, I often recommend going the informal route.

Informal route: The informal route entails going through an intermediary. The intermediary is a person known personally by the interviewee who gains an interview time and location on your behalf using her personal relationship to secure the interview rather than your research credentials or institutional affiliation. This approach often provides you quicker access, a longer interview time, and a potentially more open discussion. One can differentiate intermediaries by how close a relationship one needs with them: a facilitator is more an interested acquaintance, while a broker is more an invested friend. In addition, one can differentiate facilitators and brokers by the kinds of information one needs and how substitutable the target is for another person.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of Challenge Physically and Figuratively to Access Interview Target</th>
<th>Information Sensitivity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Actor Specific</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sensitive</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most challenging (physically and figuratively challenging)</td>
<td>Moderately challenging (physically challenging)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Actor Specific</strong></td>
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Facilitator: For non-sensitive information, a facilitator is generally sufficient. A facilitator is someone who can generally vouch for your intention and get you onto the target’s schedule. Depending on your situation, the easiest facilitator may be someone from your host institution who has a connection, or your interpreter or research assistant who knows someone who can get you an introduction. If you do not have this support, find out how you are linked to the targeted interviewee, and work your way through your chain of connections.

Broker: This basic ground work serves you well in the future, as often these people will give you helpful advice on how to make the interview as effective as possible.
For sensitive information or for very difficult to reach targets such as elites, you probably need a broker: someone who has greater access to the target, greater interest in you and the success of your project, and who will “guarantee” you. This is someone the interviewee already trusts, and by recommending you, the broker loans you that trust by expending some of her own capital with the target.

You will never gain total trust; what you need is to gain more than you would in a normal interview. A broker will loan you a little of her trust, and will also work to ensure your interview is a success. As an example, one of my brokers went as far as to ensure that the interviewee – known to be at times a taciturn person – was in a good mood by deliberately losing a tennis match to him right before our interview. By then, my broker was invested in my interview, and wanted it to go well.

Your broker can also provide advice on how the interview can be as effective as possible. Ask her things like: How would you advise I dress? Is there any topic I should avoid? Do you think I can ask to record the interview? Hopefully you will not need too many of these kinds of interviews. If you find your list of targets is long, reconsider it: how much of your data really needs to come from an interview with a more-than-usual amount of trust?

Your broker need not have a formal institutional relationship with the targeted interviewee. Often, the best relationship for purposes of loaning you trust is for the broker to have an informal relationship with the interviewee, because that informal relationship is bound by social conventions which extend to include you, however temporarily. You, in turn, must develop a relationship with the broker if the broker is going to trust you with and endorse you to her own contacts. To borrow from former US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, going through a broker makes you a “known unknown.” Relationship-building is different for everyone in every situation, depending on a host of factors: personality, age, gender, marital status, general appearance, ethnicity, religion, etc. If your potential broker does not take an immediate liking to you, you need to find a new broker, and you need to network.

Networking to expand your circle of potential facilitators and brokers

Networking in this case is building a circle of connections that increases your reputation and later helps you build more individual relationships. Most potential brokers will be more willing to be accommodating if they see that you are established in the right circles; it is the inverted logic of knowing more people, the more people
you know. For elites, who tend to be densely connected with overlapping relationships, this is a particularly useful strategy. A former foreign minister once told me quixotically, “I never meet anyone I have not already met,” by which he meant that he rarely agrees to a substantive meeting with someone he has not already been introduced to or who has not already been vouched for by an existing acquaintance. Senior academics who have spent many years building connections will have a natural advantage.

Networking can take many forms depending on who you are and who your broker is. Some networking can be done via social media, but in my experience, that only works for the maintenance of an already established relationship. Networking can involve meeting for coffee or a meal, going to an event, or paying respect at a religious or cultural occasion. If you show up at an event or occasion, make sure to introduce yourself to the target and talk to anyone else who might be related to your research. This often entails standing about awkwardly for some time and forcing yourself to approach dignitaries who are surrounded by media and hangers-on. For many of us this is an uncomfortable activity, but it is part of field work.

Lastly, research what the target looks like so you can recognize her unprompted at an event. I keep a folder of photos in my smartphone so I can readily double check what targets look like at an event.

Preventing for and conducting the interview: Practical challenges of informality
Meeting interviewees via their contacts (your intermediaries) can mean you meet them in informal settings, outside of regular business hours, or at a time when they are fitting you in while working on something else. Take care when you interview in an informal setting that you still attain informed consent.

The more informal or unstructured the interview environment, the more preparation is required: prioritize a limited number of topics, memorize questions, do extra background research. This helps when having to clarify an interesting though ultimately unhelpful tangent. I have garnered some helpful information during even short car rides when taking notes was impossible and the conversation flowed erratically between business phone calls. Also, you need to be able to pick up and drop topics quickly, for interruptions are often inevitable. Keeping an interviewee’s attention on topic while he is being interrupted by multiple secretaries, or by calls and messages on multiple mobile devices, is a challenge: my advice is to remain calm, go with the flow, gently jog his memory on the topic at hand, and act as if there is no other place you would rather be.

Methodological limitations of research relationships
When you build a relationship, your status as a neutral outsider inevitably changes. This is a benefit from an access advantage but can quickly become a cost: you may be asked to support a political elite interviewee on stage at a partisan political event in a case with opposing sides; to take a 2-day trip to meet the broker’s patron, which would have forced me to cancel or rearrange several ongoing meetings; to join a karaoke birthday party that started at 11pm where I would likely be the only woman.

1. Interview with Dr. Dino Patti Djalal, Former Deputy Foreign Minister of the Republic of Indonesia, July 2016
2. What events are important for you to attend will depend on your case and your location. Here is a short list of examples from my own research: think tank or NGO seminars, publicity events for books written by case contacts, program launching events, grand openings of restaurants owned by brokers’ friends, press conferences hosted by case interviewees.
3. I have had interviews on the fringes of a child’s birthday party, in the VIP lounge at the airport before the interviewee’s flight, in between radio session taping, and in hushed voices at the back of a committee meeting, to name a few locations.
4. In this symposium, see Shane Barter’s article for a important discussion on gaining informed consent in informal settings.
point of view, because through that personal relationship you build the trust you need for your interviews, but it is also a challenge from a methodological point of view, because once you have a personal relationship you are no longer detached. Methodological advice is mixed on this: some texts encourage you to maintain “godlike objectivity” while others encourage you to “go native” as an embedded researcher.

In reality you may not have much of a choice given your circumstances and research goals. My practical advice is to limit the number of people with whom you need to develop these personal relationships, for the sake of your time, your sanity, and your research quality. This entails carefully identifying the kind of information you need, and who among your targets you wish to interview really need higher-than-average-trust.

**Conclusion: treat your access to elites like an endangered species**

Interviewing is a rewarding component of field research. It provides a set of challenges that can be overcome with some preparation and patience, but also at times requires losing some of the researcher’s detachment in order to gain access in a way conducive to increasing trust.

Which brings me to a final word of caution. Case actors whom you interview will be networked in ways you will not understand. By building your own relationships along the way, you become part of that multi-dimensional network. This can provide wonderful access, but it also requires that you protect that access and the trust it engenders. Not only do you need to protect your informants, but you need to protect yourself: your time, your sanity, and your reputation and that of your current and future colleagues. Be aware that your actions reflect not only on you, but on every subsequent researcher an interviewee will ever encounter. Treat interviews as you would an endangered species: our actions today determine our access tomorrow.
Navigating Multiple Archives across Southeast Asia: Three Questions I Wish I Had Known to Ask

Diana Kim, Georgetown University

Introduction
This memo on multi-site archives regarding Southeast Asia is organized around three basic questions I wish I had known to ask when starting my dissertation research. My project examined opium and colonial state formation, and the main sources I consulted were government documents at the national archives of the UK, France, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Cambodia.1 While I focused on English and French language records from the pre-World War II period, I hope my experiences will resonate with scholars interested in Southeast Asia’s nearer past as well, not least as national archives house post-independence records and provide gateways into non-official collections. For comparative political scientists interested in multi-site archival research, this memo addresses practical issues of designing an itinerary and accessing records, as well as the more general challenges of managing abundance when using historical primary sources.

Background
While archival research is sometimes considered the domain of historians, there are many reasons for comparativists to explore historical primary sources. By historical primary sources, I refer to documents produced by first-hand witnesses or recorders of past events at the time, which include public and official records as well as private accounts and non-textual documents such as maps and photographs.2 A paucity of secondary case studies and skepticism towards existing explanations for my research question were two reasons why I began to explore primary sources. I was puzzled about how opium, once a lucrative source of tax revenue for European powers in Southeast Asia, became banned in the early 20th century, as a more general question about colonial state formation concerning when states abandon opportunities for revenue collection. Opium taxes represented a well-known topic in Southeast Asia’s history but without sustained inquiries into how they were administered and abolished, and I felt existing theories of global moral crusades were missing something about the particular British and French colonial experiences with prohibition. Archival research further became an approach well-suited for tracing micro-level processes of colonial administration, by examining what those involved in opium-related reforms claimed as their rationales.

Every archive is different, beginning with the basic task of entering a building and accessing documents. To briefly walk the reader through this experience, I will compare the British Library in London to the National Archives Department of Myanmar in Yangon. My first time at the British Library was in 2010 as a graduate student on a $3,000 budget for 9 weeks. Before arriving, I asked my dissertation chair for a letter of introduction (see Image One) and also emailed the archives curator whose contact information I found on the National Library’s website (called Discovery, accessible at http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/), using basic keywords like “opium”, “Burma”, “drugs.” I brought printed copies of all of these to the British Library, as well as a recent utility bill and credit card statement (to establish identity) to obtain a Reader’s Card. I used a serial number on the Reader’s Card to order documents online, which were delivered to the Asian and African Studies reading room within 70 minutes. Currently, the British Library permits the use of digital photography (i.e., smart phones and scanner apps) and 10 is the maximum number of documents that one may consult in a day.

Accessing documents at the National Archives Department of Myanmar in Yangon differs in a few ways. First, during my recent visit in the summer of 2015, obtaining a Reader’s Card required, in addition to my passport and letter of introduction, two recent photos (roughly 50 mm x 70 mm or passport size), a copy of my visa, and a 30 USD user fee as a foreigner.3 Second, entering the archives was a more interactive process, beginning with a 10 minute chat about my paperwork with the gate-keeper, another half-hour conversation with the archive’s director about my research, and then meeting the staff in the reading room. Third, instead of a public website, I used one of four terminals inside the reading room to

3. I had heard that a letter of introduction from the U.S. Embassy in Yangon would also be necessary, which I did not find to be the case. Jonathan Saha’s wonderful account of his experience in the Myanmar archives in 2012 mentions bringing a letter of support from a member of the Myanmar Historical Commission (MHC); his piece is accessible at http://imperialandglobal.exeter.ac.uk/2014/02/accessing-archives-in-myanmar-burma/.

I entered the archives without this letter, although once in the reading room, I was asked to write a brief account of what my research was about, addressed to a member of the MHC.

1. For a very helpful overview of the locations, institutional history, and general holdings of the national archives in these countries as well as Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand, see the “Archives in Southeast Asia” course wiki created by the University of British Columbia’s School of Library, Archival and Information, accessible at http://wiki.ubc.ca/ARST573/Archives_in_Southeast_Asia.
2. Distinctions between primary and secondary (or derived) sources vary by discipline. I have found Jill Lepore’s Encounters in the New World: A History in the Documents (Oxford University Press, 2000) helpful in understanding the varied forms that primary sources take as documentary evidence.

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search for documents, copied each call number by hand, and then gave the list to a staff member who either delivered physical copies of the document or pulled up digitized copies at the on-site terminal. I consulted between 5 and 20 documents per day, but this depended more on staff availability than official rules. Photographing documents is not allowed, but photocopying is available for 60 kyat per page for hardcopy prints and 125 kyat for a pdf on a CD (in 2015, the exchange rate was approximately 1 USD for 1,000-1,240 kyat, roughly 200 printed pages or 100 pdf pages.

Three Questions
Where to Start?
There are different advantages to starting in major archives (such as the British Library) versus relatively less travelled sites (like the Myanmar National Archives). In general, to borrow Aries Aruguay’s distinction between “expansive sojourn” and “surgical strike” approaches to data collection (see previous essay), larger, better-known, and generously-funded archives tend to facilitate the former, while smaller archives are better visited when one has a specific aim in mind. However, for multi-site research, location, proximity to other archives, as well as the availability of research aids are additional factors to consider. In my case, costs of living and travel dictated my first trip. In retrospect, I wish I had better known the substantive trade-offs between starting in larger versus small archives, which for research on Southeast Asia entails a choice between starting in the former metropole versus colony, given the region’s inheritance of a divided record-keeping system with Europe.

A benefit to starting in Britain (London) and France (Aix-en-Provence) is the availability of printed and online research guides and subject indices. Put simply, these are maps of the skeletal structure of a collection. Archives are not centralized repositories with rational filing arrangements, but “sites of experiences” as well as institutions with many sub-cultures. Thus, a single archive may have many different catalogues, all with different time frames, degrees of granularity, and logics of organization. Major archives are easier to first visit because there are more available maps, which range from sweeping overviews (e.g., of how records on French overseas dependencies are catalogued), topic-specific compilations (e.g., of records relating to health and disease in Burma and India), as well as a series-specific listing of all titles with a keyword index.

The downside to over-relying on these research aids is a false sense of full coverage, which is misguiding as major archives are both constantly acquiring new materials and updating catalogues.

The appeal to starting in Southeast Asia lies in the many colonial government records that were not sent to Britain and France. Reasons vary, from bureaucratic procedure to politics, but with the common result that the former holds primary sources relatively less explored by researchers, including successfully suppressed internal reports, voluminous district and municipal-level records, and personal papers. Of course, hitherto unseen records should not be valued for novelty’s sake, and original sources do not necessarily mean original arguments. In my case, the Vietnam National Archives held files on opium smugglers in the Hanoi court of appeals and private correspondence relating to financial scandals around opium revenue, documents that I did not know were missing from the records I had consulted in France. Original sources became valuable, however only after having an argument to revise or a narrative with a missing part. The downside to starting research in Southeast Asia is that pre-trip planning is more difficult, with fewer and less fine-grained research guides (notable exceptions are the National Archives of Singapore and Malaysia).

Hugues Villiers (L’Harmattan, 1983) and the Guide des fonds d’archives d’époque coloniale conservées au Centre no. 1 des Archives nationales à Hanoi (NXB Khoa Hox Xa Hoi, 1995), compiled by Ngo Thieu Hieu. Mark Bradley’s 1993 memo, “Vietnamese Archives and Scholarship on the Cold War Period” illuminates the politics that have shaped the current archives and is accessible at https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/ACFB79.pdf.
How to Manage Time Traveling Across Multiple Archives?

Again, every archive is different. There is anywhere between a 5-minute (Hanoi in August 2015) and 2-week (Hanoi in June 2015) gap of time between submitting a request and when a document arrives in one’s hands. Also, depending on a document’s classification status and confidentiality, preservation status, and very existence, one may not see the document at all. Finally, there are always too many documents to consult and limited time. Given these challenges, I found three approaches to managing time and document abundance helpful.

One is to ask for help from the staff in the reading room. It would be a mistake to necessarily presume a huge veil of secrecy or stubborn bureaucracy behind the time gap between when a document is called and delivered. It’s also a matter of the archive’s having an immense number of documents and limited staff. Or, as I learned after spending a week obsessing over a 1939 file on opium negotiations that was never delivered, sometimes requests fall through the cracks. This is not to say that controversial and sensitive documents do not exist or no special interests protect paper-trail pasts. Rather, my point is that there is always unpredictability to what documents we get to see when, and being able to differentiate between what is deliberately and inadvertently inaccessible is a good way to manage time.

The second is to keep a straightforward note-taking system. Mine had two components: (a) diary that listed the call number, title of every file I requested, the dates and location of request and access, as well as a short explanation of why I wanted it; and (b) a filing scheme for organizing my notes according to the archive’s own file structure, which makes individual documents easily re-traceable and is especially helpful for citation during write-up. The diary helped me avoid requesting documents at different sites, as well as prioritize documents to read or copy when in a time crunch. It also saved me from my own poor memory in Yangon, when I was handed a file from 1891 entitled “Discovery of 150 tolas of opium by a subdivision officer.” I was puzzled why I would have called this particular file: subdivisional officers seized opium often and 150 tolas was not a very large seizure. My diary reminded me that in the catalogue, the file title had a typo and had promised a “discovery of 150 tales of opium”, which I had hoped would include informant testimonies. I was able to skim quickly through that document and move on to the next 20 that awaited me.

The third is planning a “circle” itinerary. For instance, in 2015, I was dividing my time across three archives in Hanoi, Phnom Penh, and Yangon. I first spent a week at each archive, which was enough time to obtain access and submit a list of file requests. Then, I returned after two weeks to the first archive and read the documents I had been granted access to, submitted a second list, and hopped to the next archives where my documents were waiting for me. This type of circular itinerary is well-suited for Southeast Asia where costs of between-country travel are low and multiple-entry visas are easy to obtain (it is less appropriate for archives with digitized document-calling systems with limits on how long the archive will hold records for consultation). It makes for a bit of a hectic tour, but one that reduces “down-time” waiting for access.6

Who Do I Talk to in the Archives?

Down-time, however, is not dead-time. The cost to a circle itinerary and multi-site approaches more generally is that it reduces precious time actually spent in the reading room. Physical presence matters, not least because archival research, like any other type of field research, is a social endeavor. It is also an interpretive task because we are posing questions to subjects who do not give direct answers, often do not speak for themselves, and are difficult to locate in the first place.7 In these regards, the staff and archivists represent key informants, intermediaries and interlocutors; down-time is one way to generate a sort of trust or street-credibility, in my case, as a foreigner inquiring into the records of another nation’s past.

When I began, it was not very clear to me how to start conversations or what questions to ask. Indeed, I was a bit skeptical of spending much time talking to others with so many documents to consult and so little time to read and copy. Thus, initially, I had only technical requests for the staff—i.e., “how do I find X document?” or “could you please help me locate and copy record?”—and specific questions about my own research for the archivists—i.e., “I’m interested in changes in opium taxation policies and excise revenue collection between the 1870s to 1930s. Can you recommend sources to look at?” or “Why do you think the British banned opium?”

No matter how often I return to an archive (or visit a new one), limited down-time is stressful and it’s easy to become an anti-social ghost in the reading room, obsessively trying to spend as much time as possible

6. I am grateful to historian Claire Edington for recommending this approach.

7. On elusive answers, misguided questions, and recalcitrant documents in the historical record, see Marc Bloch’s classic The Historian’s Craft (Vintage Books, 1953).
the documents. I have observed the opposite tendency as well, in one less than tactful scholar at the Myanmar archives who barged in, explained he was in a rush, and complained about having to take off his shoes, while asking for “all your papers on U Nu” (the first Prime Minister of Burma after decolonization). 8

However, I have found it actually more efficient and less anxiety-inducing to set aside a few hours to put aside the paper and chat with the people at the archives: with the staff to introduce myself and explain why I’m there, and with the archivist to ask how s/he would go about finding the sort of information I sought. Conversation-opening questions have included: “I found this document about smugglers. Have you seen any similar ones?”; “Where would I find tax records relating to opium in this collection?”; or “Do you meet other people working on opium?” It is also worth being able to explain why I care about these topics, by having answers to questions such as “why are you writing a book on opium?” and “why are you interested in our country’s history?”

For once again, and in conclusion, every archive is different. The institutional knowledge of their record-keepers allows an outsider to search for records in places that we may not know to ask. Being sociable is also a way of being courteous, and perhaps one way to acknowledge, as Alysson Oakley’s essay (preceding in this issue) reminds us, the issues of power and status at stake in doing research in Southeast Asia as a foreigner.
Image One: Sample Letter of Introduction

HARVARD UNIVERSITY
ECONOMICS, HISTORY AND POLITICS PROGRAM
1730 CAMBRIDGE STREET, S-421 • CAMBRIDGE, MA 02138

May 21, 2015

Vietnamese National Archives Center, No. 1
12 Dao Tan Street, Ba Dinh District, Hanoi

To Whom It May Concern:

Ms. Diana Kim is a post-doctoral prize fellow in Economics, History, and Politics at Harvard University, affiliated with the Center for History and Economics. She received her Ph.D. in Political Science in 2013 from the University of Chicago. Ms. Kim is currently writing a book on the history of colonial fiscal reform and opium taxes across Southeast Asia during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, comparing the experiences of the British Empire in Burma and Malaya with the French in Indochina. Her specific interests concern the organizational structure and activities of the Customs and Excise Departments, including opium tax collection policies.

From July 3 until August 22, 2015, Ms. Kim is requesting access to the archival records available at the Vietnamese National Archives Center I (Hanoi) concerning the fiscal administration for state monopolies and the activities of the Customs and Excise Department from 1894 until 1941. Specifically, she hopes to examine the following files:

(i) Fonds de la Mairie de Hanoi

(ii) Fonds de la Direction des Finances de l’Indochine,
   a. Série C 2 - C 4: Dossiers individuels du personnel européen et indigène. 1929-1944
   b. Série D 17: Rapports d’inspection des colonies sur les routes strategiques en Indochine et le régime de l’opium
   d. Série U 1: Statistiques douanières. 1938-1942.

(iii) Fonds de la Résidence de Hai Dong
   a. Série U 3 - U 4: Liste des débitants d’alcool et d’opium établis dans la province de Hoa Binh. 1925

(iv) Fonds de la Résidence de Nam Dinh

Ms. Kim’s trip is funded by a research grant from the Council of American Overseas Research Centers and supported by the Center for History and Economics at Harvard University. She also has prior experience with colonial documents at the Centre des archives d’Outre Mer in Aix-en-
Dangerous Fieldwork in Southeast Asia
Shane Joshua Barter

Fieldwork can be exhilarating, especially in conflict areas. It is particularly important for young scholars; although senior professors might have an edge in terms of networks, knowledge, and languages, younger scholars are often willing to go off the beaten path, providing a rare competitive advantage. Although conflict zones are hardly anarchic—there remain social systems and norms that one can navigate—they are clearly unsafe. This brief vignette is not intended to encourage dangerous fieldwork, but for those who have already decided to visit conflict zones in Southeast Asia, I hope it can help ensure a safer, more productive experience.

As Elizabeth Wood observes, the usual challenges of field research are intensified in conflict zones.1 Above all, scholars should seek to minimize harm to local people (interviewees, guides, drivers, contacts) and to themselves. This may sound obvious, but it demands explicit mention. It is better to come up short in terms of data, limiting your study in some way, than to take undue risks. Chances are, they already know the work clear to the translator up front. Chances are, they already know things along, one might frame their questions, key figures want you to share your contacts, or you have a bad feeling about a remote interview, err on the side of caution. Conflict fieldwork demands knowing what information not to collect.

Context
This brief discussion is derived from my varied personal experiences working in Southeast Asian secessionist conflicts. In 2003-04, I worked in Indonesia for a Thai human rights NGO, and then for various bodies observing elections across Southeast Asia. For my dissertation field research (2008-2010), I conducted rural, non-elite interviews on civilian strategy in war. I spent six months in Aceh, two months in southern Thailand, and two months in Maguindanao, Philippines. I should note that, unlike my other cases, Aceh was a fairly ‘ordered’ conflict, with (basically) two sides and regulated violence.2 And of course, my identity as a white Canadian male cannot be separated from my experiences (see Sarah Shair-Rosenfield’s contribution on gender).

Logistics
In preparing for field research, especially in Indonesia, foreign scholars often must obtain a research visa. This process often involves working with a local university and taking part in long meetings in the capital city, running through your budget in the process. If you are studying armed conflicts, your application will often be rejected. To be successful, you need close contacts in the local academy and state, which might appear to rebels as your being aligned with state forces. Still, it is a mistake to think you can skip the research visa process. The view that you should have a totally free hand in a developing country smack of colonialism, and you could get yourself and your network in trouble. To speed things along, one might frame their research as less sensitive than it really is, actually make it less sensitive, or obtain a different class of visa. Once in the field, you will likely have to replicate the vetting process with rebels, whose drive to seem like a state can generate rebel bureaucracy, and they may also provide a sort of visa to support your work.

I began my fieldwork without translators, assured by my patchy Indonesian. I soon found that this was insufficient, as the nuance I was trying to achieve was lost, especially since most respondents insisted on local languages. In secessionist conflicts, language is politicized, so elites may refuse to speak and non-elites may not speak the national language. I ended up hiring guides/translators, seconded from local NGOs or universities. This was a wise decision, as not only did I receive more complex responses to my questions, translators often brought their own networks. Another benefit of working with a translator was that I had more time to read the room, articulate sensitive questions, and record responses while the translation was occurring. This said, I do not advocate conducting fieldwork, especially in conflicts, without some language training. One should not be dependent on translators (I found a few errors and ambiguities) and direct small-talk is a crucial way to develop a rapport with respondents.

The downside of working with a translator, beyond cost, is that you are now putting another person in harm’s way. Translators are especially likely to be targeted for bribery or intimidation, as local officials see them as a conduit to you. Make the nature of the work clear to the translator up front. Chances are, they already know the risks, sometimes better than you do—just make sure they know what they could be getting into. In terms of whom to choose, keep in mind that your guide/translator’s ethnicity could open

some doors and close others. Also, it can be important to hire someone of the same sex. Otherwise, locals may assume sexual relations are occurring, so may judge you as available, immoral, or both. For male researchers, men might perceive a female translator who travels alone with a foreign man as “easy,” and therefore a suitable target for harassment or worse. For female researchers, male translators might make unwanted sexual passes, and those around him may presume that the female scholar is available to local men.

Another issue is transportation. I prefer a motorcycle, but if you lack driving experience, do not know your way around, or are interviewing elites, this will not work. Once one hires a car and driver though, expenses rise and you add another person to your research team, putting someone else in harm’s way. One possibility is reaching out to local NGOs, who may be happy to arrange for you to work with their driver. Compared to more expensive professional drivers, NGO drivers will bring their own contacts and understand the risks.

Wading In
Removing a bandage or entering a cold pool are best done with a quick, sudden plunge. Not so for conflict fieldwork. If you have not spent much time in the specific region affected by conflict, you should ease in first by visiting neighboring areas and safer zones within the conflict area. I worked in North Sumatra and with Acehnese refugees in Malaysia long before entering Aceh, and even then I began in safer districts. Before I conducted work in Patani, I had worked in Thailand and Malaysia, and first visited nearby Songkhla. In preparation for the southern Philippines, I first visited Davao City and General Santos City, just to get a feel for the area and start building networks.

Wading into conflict fieldwork allows one to acclimate to local social and political contexts. Before entering a conflict area, one should know something of gender norms, social norms, and local cuisine. One should get used to the questions you will be asked by curious locals—which questions are normal, and which should arouse suspicion. One should also become accustomed to what to expect from local authorities, the reputations of various security forces, rebel organization and procedures, and recent conflict dynamics. Wading in is no less pressing for Southeast Asian scholars from other areas. The differences between capital cities and ethnic majority societies compared to rural conflict areas and ethnic minorities must be appreciated, and are often partly what conflicts are about. A graduate student from Jakarta, Bangkok, or Manila arriving in Aceh, Patani, or Sulu will encounter distinctive receptions from rebel groups, and may perhaps be viewed as aligned with states or migrant groups. Domestic scholars need to acclimate and learn just as much as foreign scholars, calibrating their instincts and sensibilities to a new reality.

Of course, “wading in” presents a problem for researchers with limited time and financial resources. But safety is paramount; one may be better off not conducting conflict fieldwork than jumping in without preparation. The resources spent are not wasted, providing opportunities to generate novel data. North Sumatra was home to ethnic Javanese displaced from Aceh as well as rebel-affiliated smugglers, allowing me to explore important, overlooked aspects of the conflict. One of my great regrets in southern Thailand is that I failed to visit neighboring Kelantan, Malaysia, home to many Patani Malay agricultural workers who could have shared their views with me in relative safety.

Interviews
How does one identify potential interviewees or survey respondents, especially in conflict zones, where trust is at a premium and respondents may be affiliated with a particular side? One often hears of “snowballing” as a method to identify interviewees: as you interview one person, ask them to share their contacts. Except for when one is just starting out, this strategy should be avoided. Most respondents will naturally lead you to like-minded people, as snowballing represents the very definition of bias. One could ask interviewees to recommend someone who would disagree with them (this can be fun), but the best way to identify sources is to cultivate “several parallel and evolving networks of contacts.”

This approach is especially important in conflict areas, as it helps to avoid perceived and real bias. Perhaps begin with local academics, activists, and journalists. In Aceh, where my networks were strongest, I had rebel, army, activist, kinship, academic, and business networks that introduced me to very different people. Varied networks contribute to safety, but also data validity. If one asks the same question of different people and receives similar answers, one can more confidently generalize. If they provide different answers, the young novice scholar has variation to be explained in the dissertation or a spin-off article.

Interviews in conflict areas present distinct challenges. Since Alysson Oakley’s contribution addresses elite interviews, I will focus on non-elites. Non-elite interviews tend to...
be easier to arrange and subject to fewer formalities, but respondents are often more vulnerable. If people seem reluctant to discuss certain issues, trust their instincts and do not take it personally. In terms of what to discuss, although specialized questions might be outside of the expertise of rice farmers or bus drivers, do not assume they lack insight. Many Southeast Asian villagers are well-informed, or at least have the pulse of popular opinion. A methodological downside of non-elite interviews, in coffee shops, houses, or mosques, is that local people might come and go. This can make discussions stretch on for hours, and it is tough to keep track of who said what. Dissertation committees and publishers might ask you how many people you interviewed, and this makes a precise number impossible. Does the weird guy in the corner count? Does the woman who said one thing, then had to leave? This to-and-fro also means that newcomers may not know who you are and what you are doing, undermining informed consent. Overall though, I found these amorphous group discussions to be extremely informative as well as enjoyable.

When interviewing armed groups, do not be scared to ask difficult questions, but make sure you get a feel for the room first and ease into those questions. I interviewed some rebel commanders who simply seemed edgy (beware of men with gold teeth and cowboy hats), so I asked them softball questions to pass the time. Again, potentially interesting data is not worth exceptional danger. Other rebel commanders seemed more congenial, so I felt it was acceptable to broach difficult issues such corruption or violence towards minorities. It helps to frame your questions with empathy, perhaps acknowledging the brutality of state forces and the value of the rebel mission, but noting some rotten apples. I found that controversial questions often lead to better interviews, perhaps because they were unexpected or respondents felt these issues should be addressed.

Beware how armed groups will perceive you in the field. Western researchers are often perceived as CIA agents.4 American intelligence agents have posed as students and professors in the past, and their agencies have used academics for intel, so state and rebel forces have legitimate concerns.5 For some hard-nosed respondents, even my Canadian passport was not evidence that I am not from American intelligence. For the few occasions where these concerns persisted, I had to develop a line to keep moving—I am not CIA, but if they think I am, tell me what you want the CIA to know about the conflict. Their concerns were not unfounded, as I later had Western intelligence officials approach me, flattering me about my research and asking about my contacts (especially Islamist ones). Do not let the desire for professional rewards cloud your ethics. I recommend sharing conference papers and publications—you may well want to influence policy and expand your network—but guard your interview notes and contact information closely.

As you conduct your interviews, keep your data safe. Armed groups might confiscate your computer or your notes at check points, or steal your documents from hotels. Taking notes digitally, or quickly transcribing or scanning them, makes it easier to backup and encrypt information. When you have internet access, clouds/dropboxes are increasingly useful, so that you are not carrying files with you. When I recorded audio interviews, I saved them as MP3 files in my music directory to make them more difficult to identify. Do what you can to keep your data safe, but if you expect it to be extremely sensitive, consider research that does not put others in harm’s way.

A final issue relates to publishing. Throughout my fieldwork, I asked local people if they wished to remain anonymous. The majority of respondents wanted their names to be listed. Taking their agency seriously, I agreed, especially since doing so increases transparency. I did not expect that well-meaning publishers and colleagues would be critical. Since other scholars insist on anonymity in conflict fieldwork, many felt that I should, as well. However, my topic was how ordinary villagers navigated the conflict—less sensitive a topic than, say, a project identifying perpetrators or victims. Should one err on the side of caution and please publishers, while going against the expressed opinion of respondents? My response was to enforce anonymity for controversial points, sometimes by writing “group interview” in the citation. I mostly defended my respondents’ requests to be named, at least in Aceh. For the active, unpredictable conflict in southern Thailand, I rarely gave respondents the choice. In Aceh, respondents not only wanted to be named, many also wanted to see their names in print. Field research does not end when you return home—part of establishing relationships is that you cannot simply cut people loose when you have the data you want. In return trips, you may want to carry offprints, but increasingly, villagers have smart phones and can be sent digital publications and photos. Translating articles is another concern,

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4. Beware how armed groups will perceive you in the field. *Western researchers are often perceived as CIA agents*

again because locals may only understand local languages; consider employing local activists to draft translated summaries of your work.

Conclusions
Armed conflicts are not anarchic, and conducting fieldwork in such regions may not be as risky as people think. I always felt safer working in Aceh than I did driving in Bangkok. But the work is nonetheless dangerous. Young scholars need to think hard about the risks of doing this work. The insights provided in this paper may be less helpful for some than for others, but I hope they can play a small part in encouraging safer and more productive conflict fieldwork.
Much has been written on the challenges facing field researchers who self-or otherwise identify as members of non-majority identity groups. PS: Political Science & Politics has run three symposia: on field research methods in the Middle East (2006); issues of identity, intersectionality, and field research (2009); and challenges and solutions facing field researchers (2014). Each has contributed to a more complete understanding of the difficulties researchers face in trying to conduct interviews, gather data, attend events, and maintain a sense of personal identity that enables us to both pass societal scrutiny and reflect who we want to be perceived as, all while still completing our research. These challenges are faced with increasing frequency as diversity within our profession broadens to include researchers from identity groups who may previously not have had such opportunities. Perhaps more importantly, the amount of training devoted specifically to conducting field research often seems haphazard and advisor-specific compared with quantitative methods training or even language training. As just one example: learning to navigate your university’s Internal Review Board (IRB) process in order to carry out interview, survey, experimental or related projects in the field usually comes down to advice and individualized instruction from one’s dissertation committee members rather than any formal training or preparation via a classroom or other organized forum.

In the context of fieldwork preparations, junior scholars are often warned about the complexities of ethics and identity. It was difficult to walk the line between presenting myself in a way that closely represented how I wanted others to see me—a professional, well-informed doctoral student in need of data and answers on specific questions and topics—and presenting myself in a way that was still socially acceptable to Southeast Asians, despite evidently not fitting into social norms and expectations about who a doctoral student “should be” (e.g. young, female, mixed race/ambiguously non-white). My own view, influenced by the views of other scholars and my experiences in the field, is that walking that line is complicated and difficult, plagued by numerous and constant trade-offs. In recognition and acknowledgement of many contemporary female researchers who faced different and more difficult challenges than I did, I was never in a position where I really felt physically threatened or pressured by anyone I met with and during the vast majority of my research, I felt that I received or earned the respect of those with whom I interacted. But the potential difficulties in Southeast Asia are real, even if my experience suggests a moderate level of discomfort that is dramatically less tricky or dangerous than that faced by many other researchers in the region. For another perspective about personal physical security and fieldwork, see Shane Barter’s piece in this collection.

These are not challenges exclusively faced by researchers of and in Southeast Asia; the pre-fieldwork advice and suggestions that I found most helpful often complemented or coincided with that of scholars working in other world regions, such as the Middle East and Latin America. As with many of the perspectives shared by the contributors to this symposium, much of what follows likely applies to fieldwork across different regions.

Marital status: an odd ethical conundrum

During the majority of my fieldwork I was in a committed long-term relationship, but I was not married. If I had been a man in my late 20s or early 30s, I suspect that this would probably have received less attention in the course of discussion with many interview subjects. However, I recognized that in order to avoid lengthy or complicated discussions that might damage people’s perceptions of me or my credibility in general, I would likely have to clarify to many people I interacted with whether I was “single” or “married,” since “single but in a long-term relationship” posed a number of follow-up questions, with few straightforward explanations. This realization brought me to an ethical dilemma: be honest and admit that I was single or lie and say that I was married? I routinely defaulted to the latter, as coping to the former nearly always resulted in a range of come-ons, judgmental questions, and/or attempts to help me find a husband, all of which could completely derail interviews and meetings while undermining my credibility as a researcher.

In the context of fieldwork preparations, junior scholars are often warned about the complexities of ethics and identity. It was difficult to walk the line between presenting myself in a way that closely represented how I wanted others to see me—a professional, well-informed doctoral student in need of data and answers on specific questions and topics—and presenting myself in a way that was still socially acceptable to Southeast Asians, despite evidently not fitting into social norms and expectations about who a doctoral student “should be” (e.g. young, female, mixed race/ambiguously non-white). My own view, influenced by the views of other scholars and my experiences in the field, is that walking that line is complicated and difficult, plagued by numerous and constant trade-offs. In recognition and acknowledgement of many contemporary female researchers who faced different and more difficult challenges than I did, I was never in a position where I really felt physically threatened or pressured by anyone I met with and during the vast majority of my research, I felt that I received or earned the respect of those with whom I interacted. But the potential difficulties in Southeast Asia are real, even if my experience suggests a moderate level of discomfort that is dramatically less tricky or dangerous than that faced by many other researchers in the region. For another perspective about personal physical security and fieldwork, see Shane Barter’s piece in this collection.

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were only two real drawbacks with saying I was married: 1) the fact that I was lying to whomever I told this to, and 2) it was always followed by the questions “And do you have a family [e.g. children]? No? Why not?” This sort of interaction was not limited to those I had with men.

The fact that I knew there might be risks, including jeopardizing my ability to be taken seriously or my physical security if I met a particularly aggressive person alone in a room with a young single female who had “requested a meeting,” kept me from being particularly distraught about this lie I routinely told. The need to deal with this type of ethical quandary by adapting your behavior or expectations will be somewhat dependent on the topic you work on: my research mostly involved interviews with national elected officials and political party leaders, a group that includes some egregious sexists in any country. If you work on issues of religion, ethnicity, class, and/or labor in Southeast Asia, sexism or judgment on issues such as marital and family status are likely to affect you, as well, though perhaps in very different ways. For example, a similarly constraining set of norms and expectations may apply to men, such as in the context of interviewing members of conservative religious organizations in which researchers’ marital and family status may affect how they are viewed. Other considerations related to gender and sexual identity can certainly limit how accurately you may choose to present or feel comfortable in describing yourself when working in a world region where more traditional views and norms about such identities prevail.

Furthermore, navigating such ethical quandaries can be more discomforting when the norms you are violating come from your own “identity” group. I always had a more difficult time telling women these “white lies” because they often seemed to me to be asking from either a “shared identity” perspective or that of an odd double-standard I rarely faced from men. Role-incongruity expectations and judgments may be much more complex within your own identity group, and thus may present you with distinct challenges compared to those from people who perceive themselves to be quite different from you. When I attended training workshops, focus groups, and campaign events run by and/or specifically targeted for women, answering questions about my marital and family status felt very different compared to when I conducted interviews with legislative party leaders or government ministers, who were mostly men. The women I encountered often wanted to know if I had managed to do my scholarly work either while still engaged in (e.g. marriage and family) or despite (e.g. single and childless) expected/typical feminine behavior. In attempting to represent myself accurately in my interviews with women, I tended to want to explain myself and my choices, often because I wanted them to understand why I would either choose to conform or not to social expectations. Yet, you have limited ability to alter social norms and conventions while you are in the field, and attempts to effect change in this way will likely have some additional effect on how and what people think about you.

The intersectionality problem: young + female = student (e.g. not a scholar)
A similar need to alter your behavior or expectations may apply when you face disadvantageous preconceptions about who you are and what you are likely to know, based predominantly on how you look/are identified. When requesting interviews or meetings from individuals with whom I did not have a prior relationship, I often erred on the side of an overly formal introduction—name, academic status at an American university, and the topic I wanted to talk about (e.g. Indonesian electoral reform). I did this to try to prevent the common misconception that as a young woman I would have no idea what I was talking about, asking about, or researching. Relatedly, I also always refused initial meetings or interviews in non-public places, such as someone’s home or “personal office,” in case my gender encouraged individuals to misconstrue my goals as anything other than research-oriented. Such misperceptions ultimately did not interfere with my ability to do my research, but I often wonder how much time during interviews and meetings I had to waste in up-front demonstrations of my knowledge on the subject about which I was talking to people. For example, once, while waiting to interview the governor of Central Java, a (male) staffer came out to investigate me out of sheer curiosity. The staffer then lectured me about my misunderstanding of specific aspects of my research, even though it was not within his area of expertise and my subsequent interview with the governor confirmed that my original perceptions had been correct.”

I doubt that my gender was the only cause of this outcome, as regional
Shair-Rosenfield

elites and their staffers often like to wax philosophical and political to foreign researchers. Other opportunities, such as hanging around drinking coffee or smoking during political discussions of groups of male professionals from polling firms, political parties, or other politically-oriented groups, would not have been open to me if I were not a foreigner since women are rarely, if ever, invited into these inner circles. These are the sites of less formal interactions that tend to comprise a lot of field research and access to these opportunities often seemed to be even more dependent on personal networks and who would vouch for me than formal interactions, where my status as a doctoral researcher with an American university affiliation typically would suffice. I was regularly granted access to such opportunities on the basis of name-dropping a handful of high-profile scholars, policy-makers, pollsters, and media personalities, all the while aware that access would be much more difficult if I were not a foreigner. Yet, it was clear that as a woman, I was simply not expected to have a mastery of certain topics, regardless of who vouched for me. The only subject on which I never received much pushback about whether I knew what I was talking about was the issue of gender quotas, which brings me to my final point ...

Subject of interest: you’re a woman, what do you mean you don’t study women?!

I do study women and gender issues as they relate to politics. This is one area where opportunities that arose while I was initially doing fieldwork actually led me to pursue certain research projects I otherwise had not previously considered. Yet, the majority of my research is not about women. Nor is it the primary or only focus of many female scholars of Southeast Asian politics. Despite this fact, when I raise topics that are decidedly NOT about women during field interviews or meetings, I often get lectured that I should be studying women legislators and candidates, or women’s organizations. Furthermore, the questions I ask about women do not require a preceding discussion of what I know on the subject, but the questions I ask about other topics (e.g., party campaign strategies, electoral threshold formulae) tend to necessitate that I qualify my question with a lengthy pre-question description that demonstrates my knowledge about the topic. The pre-question description was not always a part of my question-asking process or technique, but evolved as a result of the responses I got during my early fieldwork.

I have received a number of opportunities to study women in Indonesian political contexts, and I recognize that my identity as a woman has granted me access to such opportunities that I suspect may not have been so easily obtained otherwise. I also recognize that while the granting of those opportunities has been beneficial in some ways, the role of women in politics is not a topic that mainstream politicians or scholars in the region care much about. For example, when contacts suggest female colleagues who I “must” speak to regarding topics related to the role of women in politics, such women are often not actually working in areas or on topics that I am researching but are seemingly the only professional women that my contacts know and with whom they can put me in touch. Thus, I am being granted wider access to a topic that my interlocutors have deemed “appropriate” for me to care about, but about which few people of consequence care or know any relevant knowledgeable or well-networked women. I have always been curious enough to take these opportunities when presented, while simultaneously contemplating whether I am wasting a good deal of valuable fieldwork time and “othering” myself in the process.

Concluding thoughts

Being a young, female field researcher in Southeast Asia is not a job without some risks, but the opportunities largely outweigh the costs. Indonesia, in particular, is a relatively safe place where being a foreign scholar can provide amazing access to opportunities and educational experiences that are difficult to attain in many other research environments. Nevertheless, (young) women doing fieldwork in the region face double-standards and unique challenges and it is important that scholars be mindful and appreciative of this reality when preparing for, conducting, and evaluating the products of such work.

“Field” is often a very lonely place, and many young researchers may be in search of established scholars in the field to whom they might turn for help.


9. I should note that this is a common occurrence even when I am not in the field.

10. This pattern is reflected in the scholarly literature on Southeast Asian politics, which has largely ignored the role of women except where a token chapter or mention of “women’s movements” occurs or someone points out that every female executive in the region is someone’s “wife or daughter.”
advice and mentorship. For young women this quest might be particularly difficult, as they may want such advice, yet see very few people who look like them and face (or have faced) similar challenges. However, in recent years the number of American and US-based female scholars of politics in Southeast Asia has grown, while many gender norms both in academia and in the region have begun to change. There are now significant resources and some additional advantages, such as increased access to studying women’s issues, which are available to young female scholars in the region. Moreover, the study of women’s roles, issues, and agency has become much more mainstream in political science, as have broader topics related to more general gender dynamics in politics (e.g. issues of sexuality and masculinity, rather than just the biological male–female divide). As such, there are some exciting opportunities for young women doing fieldwork in the region or working on regional gender and politics issues, even despite the additional ethical, representation, and mentoring challenges they face.
A number of symposia have highlighted challenges junior scholars confront when doing fieldwork that pertain to this symposium’s theme of “sustainable fieldwork.”¹ Many focus on the important question of how a researcher’s ethnicity, gender, and national identity can impact a researcher’s fieldwork. Others consider problems that simply arise from being a junior scholar, such as difficulty accessing data, making contacts, and raising money.² Perhaps surprisingly, few essays touch on consulting, a potentially important component of fieldwork that has relevance to each of these issues. Consulting may be relevant to these concerns for several reasons. First, it may directly enable some projects and indirectly help others.³ Consulting may help with access to data, facilitating contacts, and generating resources for projects. Finally, on the important issue of the researcher’s identity, it may help ameliorate some (though certainly not all) of the practical challenges scholars face when their identity may pose obstacles in accessing information.


However, while consulting may offer benefits, it presents potential traps. These include opportunity costs and unmet expectations. Both of these drawbacks may lead to headaches for the researcher if not anticipated. Ethical concerns are also important. A final concern is whether or not association with an INGO may impact a scholar’s reputation in the academic community or in the field. With these concerns in mind, in this essay I will discuss the benefits and drawbacks of consulting for sustainable fieldwork and conclude the essay with a discussion of when consulting may be a valuable strategy to pursue. I will also suggest some possible leads in the context of Southeast Asia.

**Why Consult?**

Consulting may offer several benefits for junior scholars just entering the field. Most obviously, consulting can provide resources when research grants are not available. Depending on the position, consulting opportunities may offer payment that could provide enough money for food and lodging in the field. In other cases, the organization may also provide airfare. Outside of funding, consulting can provide a researcher with a place to work. One overlooked challenge of fieldwork, particularly for those who don’t enjoy working in hotel rooms, coffee shops, or apartments, is workspace. On most of the projects I have worked on, the collaborator provided a desk, which granted me Internet access, coffee, and lunch companions!

Consulting work may also provide direct benefits for a scholar’s research project. However, here, the benefits depend more on the nature of the collaboration. In the best-case scenario, when the interests of the INGO and the scholar are aligned, the scholar may use the INGO’s resources to scale up a given project. For a quantitative, survey-based study, INGO resources may allow the scholar to survey more respondents. An INGO shaped by my experience working with organizations that I have the most experience with – INGOs such as the World Bank, Oxfam, and the UNDP. However, the range of organizations is potentially broader. Private companies, government agencies, lobbying groups, political parties, and political candidates may also seek to employ a scholar’s services. As I will discuss below, the identity of the organization is important to the potential benefits that organization can deliver as well as the potential impact the cooperation may have on the scholar’s reputation.

**Different forms of collaboration**

Scholars may consult with organizations, which will typically include international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) in different capacities. One typical form of cooperation is contract work, where a consultant either writes a report or contributes some portion of a smaller report. For example, on one project for the UNDP, I proposed and completed a report examining how men and women differ in their performance in the Vietnam National Assembly.⁴ Another form of consulting involves contracts where the consultant takes a longer-term role with the organization. For example, for the UNDP I am a longer-term consultant on the annual Viet Nam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI).⁵

The range of organizations also varies considerably. This paper is largely


may also enable a scholar to initiate an experimental intervention, particularly where the intervention calls for people on the ground. For qualitative work, an INGO may allow a scholar to access more sites.

These benefits are more obvious. However, there may be additional benefits. First, consulting could expand a scholar’s network. While some networking is necessary to acquire the consulting job in the first place (see below), once the scholar is “in,” the new colleagues she will meet will expand the connections the scholar may make. Lunch outings, social gatherings, and informal conversations over the water cooler may generate unexpected leads on the search for interviews or new sources of data.

Collaboration may also provide an alternative channel of entry to government institutions. While many agencies should provide information to scholars regardless of affiliation, in some cases it may help when the scholar has the backing of an institution registered in the country rather than a foreign university, which may have less leverage. In one instance I was able to gain access to government archives in Hanoi through a letter of introduction provided by an INGO I was consulting with where it might not have been possible otherwise.

Consulting may also ameliorate challenges a scholar faces due to their personal background. Previous work has noted the importance of “positionality” in research, where it is sometimes beneficial to be seen as an insider versus an outsider or higher versus lower on the social hierarchy. Collaboration with an INGO, particularly one that is well-resourced and well-respected in the country, may bolster the student’s credibility. It may also bolster the perceived “usefulness” of the scholar, particularly when the subject of the scholar’s dissertation does not have any easily explained, direct benefit for those whose cooperation the scholar needs. For this reason, much like having two passports, it is advisable for the scholar to carry two business cards: one from the university and one from the INGO.

Finally, for researchers who anticipate a career focusing on a specific country or region, a long-term consulting arrangement can provide additional benefits in terms of keeping the scholar up-to-date on issues in the country. This is particularly useful in a context like Vietnam, where contacts are important for keeping abreast of political developments. Maintaining a flow of information is invaluable both for ensuring that I remain up-to-date on the issues in Vietnam, but also for generating new projects.

The Disadvantages

Before rushing headlong into any consulting gig that presents itself, it is important to consider some of the potential pitfalls that may hinder the “sustainability” of one’s fieldwork down the line. One concern is the opportunity cost of engaging in consulting projects. INGOs that offer consulting opportunities, particularly those that are paid, expect a quality final product. In most cases, the final product differs from academic work. INGOs typically want “news they can use” that is directly policy relevant and lighter on methodological and theoretical discussions. Academic publications, on the other hand, require methodological rigor and theoretical relevance.

These conflicting incentives may incentivize a scholar to skew a project to their research interests, or “mail in” the report to the INGO. However, damaging one’s reputation with an INGO can have costs. In Vietnam, and I suspect in other contexts, too, the circle of donors engaged in research is small. Therefore, if a scholar burns an INGO on a project with what they perceive to be shoddy or uninteresting work, word will get around. Not only will this make it more difficult for the scholar to collaborate in the future, but it may also damage the scholar’s reputation in policy circles. Therefore, it is imperative to ensure that once committed to a project, the scholar meets the INGO’s expectations.

However, meeting the INGO’s expectations can be demanding in terms of time, particularly when the subject of the work differs greatly from the scholar’s or when the INGO is not clear on what they want. This risk is compounded when research is on an unfamiliar topic, as the scholar will have to engage in additional literature reviews and research to ensure they have credible expertise on a given topic area. While INGOs may not have the technical ability of the researcher, most of them know their fields extremely well and will be able to tell when the scholar has not done their homework.

Another concern is the possibility that the INGO may not meet the scholar’s expectations. In some cases, a scholar may agree to collaborate based on the expectation that the INGO will be able to help them roll out a large-scale research initiative. As such, the scholar may agree to spend
of a lot of time developing a research proposal, developing the research design, and writing the report only to discover that the INGO cannot follow through on the original design, either for administrative reasons or due to resource constraints. In this case, the scholar may sign onto a project, potentially for little money, expecting to have something that is publishable only to find that the research design is changed by the INGO at a later date. At that point, the scholar is left with the responsibility of completing their project to maintain their reputation, with little to show for it.

Finally, before agreeing to work with an organization, the scholar should consider how the reputation of the INGO will impact the scholar’s reputation within the academic community and the country that the scholar does research in. Within academia, some scholars may identify certain INGOs with particularly policy positions. As such, collaboration with those INGOs may impact the perception of the scholar’s independence. This concern even extends to large INGOs such as the World Bank, which for many is (or at least was) associated with the so-called “Washington Consensus.” The reputation costs may also extend to the field. For example, collaborating with institutions engaged in democracy promotion may compromise the ability of a scholar to do research in an authoritarian context. Ultimately, how a scholar manages this specific issue depends on the scholar’s beliefs and future research goals.

Ethical concerns
An additional concern relates to the issue of IRB approval. As Nickerson and Hyde note, scholars may sometimes implement experiments in collaboration with INGOs (2016). This leads to the important question of the scholar’s IRB responsibilities.

In general, they conclude that the scholar must seek IRB approval in cases where they INGO would not have implemented the intervention without the collaboration of the researcher. In cases where the INGO is already engaged in the intervention, but the scholar merely helps with research design (i.e. randomization of the treatment), then the scholar should seek approval for the research design but is not responsible for the intervention.

A more general ethical concern to consider is how the INGO will use the product of the collaboration. This is important in the context of authoritarian regimes, particularly when the scholar may be sharing information about the identity of informants. Before agreeing to cooperate with an INGO, the scholar should consider whether or not the collaboration will endanger anyone the scholar has collaborated with or whether the fruits of the collaboration will cause any harm.

When to Consult? Maximizing the Benefits and Minimizing the Costs
When should a scholar seek consulting opportunities and how should one avoid the pitfalls? Of course, an important concern will be the scholar’s needs and prior commitments. If a scholar has a major grant and no issues in terms of access, the need for such collaboration will be low. However, this is not likely to be the case for most junior scholars. The generous NSF Dissertation improvement grant, for example, only provides about $15,000. Therefore, a simple rule of thumb is to be choosier as one’s needs decrease. When the scholar has not engaged in any research in the country, it may be more beneficial to take on a project that is not explicitly related to a scholar’s project in order to establish a network and credibility on the ground. Assuming the project is feasible and the time frame is not overly onerous, it may be advisable to sign on.

Another important safeguard is to do your homework on the INGO. This is particularly important when the purpose of the collaboration is more directly centered on implementing a project. Some relevant questions to ask are whether or not the INGO has a history of solid research and whether or not they have the capacity to deliver. If they do not, then it is up to the scholar to inquire how the agency will deliver this time. During the negotiation stage the scholar should be up front about their expectations in terms of workload, research output, and the ability to use the data for one’s own research publications.

Finally, it is important that whatever the scholar does, once signed on, the scholar should please the client. Hopefully, interests are aligned from the outset and this will occur as a matter of course. However, even when the interests diverge during the course of the collaboration, the scholar should ensure, to the extent possible, that they deliver on the contract. While it may require additional effort in the short term, the damage to one’s reputation can make future research more difficult.

An important caveat is that the scholar should also resist any pressure to tailor the conclusions of the study to the preferred conclusion of the organization if the data do not warrant it. In this case, the scholar should even be willing to risk some conflict with the organization, as compromising the quality of one’s research could have a damaging, long-term effect.

Getting your foot in the door: Consulting in Southeast Asia
How does a junior scholar get her foot in the door? Certainly, it is more
difficult to find consulting opportunities the less experienced one is. However, there are some opportunities that may be available to junior researchers—particularly those with either language or technical skills. Scholars may be able to offer their services at a “discount” initially in order to help conduct data analysis on a survey, conduct field interviews, or volunteer for an intervention. However, even providing discounted services may require a network. For this, the best place to look is to one’s adviser, particularly if they have networks on the ground. Where this is not possible, scholars may be able to research which organizations are active in a particular country and contact them directly. If the scholar has a research grant that enables them to travel to the country without the INGO having to pay, they may be willing to take the scholar on as free labor. Outside of using one’s own adviser, some other angles to take in terms of looking for consulting opportunities could include networking within Southeast Asian oriented research communities such as the Southeast Asia Research Group (SEAREG) or APSA’s Southeast Asia related group. Both of these groups have experts in all countries in Southeast Asia, who will likely be familiar with the important organizations in those countries.
Fieldwork and the academic job market as a Southeast Asianist
Kai Ostwald, University of British Columbia

The generally poor state of the academic job market has been widely reported upon, and it is no secret that the number of PhDs on the academic job market exceeds the number of available tenure-track positions. Social scientists whose research focuses on Southeast Asia face a particular challenge in seeking employment, as few positions in North America or Europe call specifically for expertise on the region. But Southeast Asianists can and do regularly succeed in getting hired. Other contributions in this collection of essays provide specific advice on individual aspects of completing dissertation fieldwork without explicitly assessing the implications for securing employment. The purpose of this essay is broader: it provides an overview of the North American political science job market and then suggests that there are two general channels through which dissertation fieldwork can boost a junior scholar’s chances of navigating the market successfully. The job market is a fickle beast: there is no simple formula to unlock it and guarantee success. But awareness of the points developed below can help ensure that fieldwork is not just intellectually productive, but valuable for profession development, well.

The first channel involves developing case expertise and crafting a scholarly identity. There is a clear commonality among most of the Southeast Asianists who have succeeded on the academic job market in recent years: they have produced work that is grounded in a deep understanding of the region, but resonates strongly in broader disciplinary debates that ultimately transcend region. This is reflected in their scholarly identities, which balance elements of disciplinary and regional expertise. Professional development in most PhD programs focuses strongly on the former, often leaving other elements – like recognition as an area expert – up to students. It goes without saying that fieldwork provides an unparalleled opportunity to build the case expertise necessary for producing a stronger and more competitive dissertation. But beyond this, it also offers an opportunity for students to develop a reputation for area expertise and to grapple with the individual balance between disciplinary and regional focus. Being able to articulate this scholarly identity will make for a more coherent job application and, ceteris paribus, better employment prospects.

The second and related channel involves building a professional network. Academia is a collective endeavor. Job candidates are assessed not as individuals in a bubble, but as nascent nodes in existing scholarly networks. As such, the more established a candidate’s foothold in the relevant networks is, the better their chances of positive outcomes will be. Obviously, fieldwork provides an opportunity to build professional networks in the country of study, which should be fully pursued. But more than that, it provides a strong opportunity to build networks among North America, Europe, or Australia-based scholars who also work on the country of study, as well as with NGOs and other IOs that bring their own deep networks.

The political science job market
Paul Schuler and I wrote an article for Pacific Affairs that examined the state of the academic job market for scholars of Southeast Asia.1 The findings underscore a widely held belief: few tenure track positions in the North American political science job market call specifically for expertise on Southeast Asia. In fact, only 2 (UC San Diego and Ohio University) of the 122 postings in the 2014/2015 APSA Comparative Politics job advertisements made mention of interest in Southeast Asia expertise, and neither were earmarked specifically for experts on the region.2 This contrasts strongly with other regions like Latin America (18 positions mention interest in region, while 8 are earmarked specifically for the region), Middle East and North Africa (16 and 8 respectively), Sub-Saharan Africa (13 and 6 respectively), or even China (10 and 4 respectively) and South Asia (10 and 2 respectively). Extending the search back to 2002 using a dataset supplied by APSA revealed similar results.3

How are we to interpret this? Area expertise is clearly valued: even if only a small fraction of positions call specifically for expertise in Southeast Asia, most of the comparative politics job listings call for some regional focus. Moreover, the near absence of jobs earmarked for Southeast Asia does not imply an absence of interest in the region. Quite to the contrary, my own experiences suggest that many scholars of comparative politics see Southeast Asia as important and would welcome a colleague that brings this expertise to a department. The absence of earmarked positions has more to do with Southeast Asia being perpetually overshadowed by larger

2. Two additional postings from Singapore (Yale-NUS and Singapore Management University) also mentioned Southeast Asia expertise. Given the job market cycle, we relied on APSA’s September 2014 job listing document for the analysis.

3. We also looked beyond political science to several other disciplines, including History, Cultural Anthropology, and Religious Studies. Those searches revealed similar patterns.
or more proximate regions in the formulation of department priorities. In short, the job market figures are sobering for Southeast Asianists, but they should not be seen as a broad rejection of area expertise generally or Southeast Asia expertise specifically; candidates should rest assured that regional expertise is an asset.

**Leveraging regional expertise**

While there is strong and growing interest in Southeast Asia, the lack of earmarked jobs dedicated to its study means that candidates should not expect to get hired primarily on the basis of their expertise in the region. Rather, it is incumbent upon them to leverage Southeast Asia's rich diversity to produce a dissertation that addresses a question of general importance to comparative politics, or whatever other broader field a candidate wishes to engage. The past decade especially provides many examples of research that does precisely this by addressing a general political science audience while remaining deeply grounded in the Southeast Asian context.⁴ This research, in other words, leverages regional expertise to build general political science knowledge and contribute to the development of general political science theory. To be clear, not all of a candidate's work must strike this balance, but without a critical portion that does, it will be difficult to secure employment in a disciplinary unit.

What does this merging of discipline and area expertise look like in practice? Beyond the examples I reference above, I can briefly share my own experiences. Several debates in the ethnic politics literature resonated strongly with me during the early phases of my PhD program. Yet I found that the theories, which were generated primarily from cases in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, were difficult to reconcile with my understanding of ethnicity in Singapore and Malaysia. In the latter cases, much of the diversity is the result of migration and politically motivated group differentiation, which has significant implications for how ethnic diversity manifests itself. This recognition motivated an interest in studying how states use public policies in areas like housing, schooling, and national service to shape the ethnic identities of their citizens—something that does not get much attention in the aforementioned cases that dominate the study of ethnicity in comparative politics. Bringing this back to the discipline, the aim of this research agenda is to broaden the general understanding of how public policy can impact the manifestations of ethnic diversity. We might even argue that Singapore and Malaysia are particularly well situated to provide insights and lessons on this, given that they have been experimenting with various policy approaches for nearly half a century, considerably longer than many other cases where large-scale mass migration from culturally dissimilar places is a more recent phenomenon.

It is not always easy to determine when a project that is grounded in Southeast Asia will generate sufficient enthusiasm in the broader discipline. A former committee member of mine suggested a useful exercise: each time I shared a new research idea, I was asked to identify the five scholars that I hoped to engage with the project. When none of the names I gave were active and well-positioned (in North American) political scientists, he advised me to save the project for a later date. Further, he pushed me to articulate how my arguments would build on the (current) work of those scholars (including non-Southeast Asianists), similarly suggesting that I alter the project if I could not convincingly articulate this. I suggest this exercise with some hesitation. Impactful research comes in many forms, and it is important that students conduct research that excites and motivates them (as opposed to research that feels imposed on them). But it is likewise true that the job market is highly competitive, and that—all else equal—PhD candidates will find it easier to generate enthusiasm for their projects if they have clear relevance to the active research agendas of established scholars in the discipline they seek to work in.

While the disciplinary component of research is provided by graduate training, it is often left up to students to develop the sufficient case expertise necessary to produce strong research. This is especially true for students of Southeast Asia, given the remarkable diversity of this area and the sparse attention it receives in most departments. But even when there are resources at a home university, the bulk of expertise on Southeast Asia is in Southeast Asia. For example, if a

⁴ There are far too many excellent research of this type to provide a comprehensive list here, but among the most visible examples are Dan Slater’s Ordering Power: Contentious Politics and Authoritarian Leviathans in Southeast Asia (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010); Edmund Malesky and Paul Schuler’s “Nodding or Needling: Analyzing Delegate Responsiveness in an Authoritarian Parliament,” American Political Science Review, 104(3): 482-502; Allen Hicken’s Building Party Systems in Developing Democracies (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Andrew Macintyre’s The Power of Institutions: Political Architecture and Governance (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003); or Meredith Weiss’s Protest and Possibilities: Civil Society and Coalitions for Political Change in Malaysia (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006) for highly visible examples. Readers may also want to consult Erik Kuhonta, Dan Slater, and Tuong Vu, Southeast Asia in Political Science: Theory, Region, and Qualitative Analysis (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008) for a lengthy examination of how the study of Southeast Asia can contribute to questions of...
scholar wants to write a dissertation on ethnicity in Singapore and Malaysia (as I did), there is no substitute for learning from Singaporean and Malaysian scholars, whose knowledge on that topic far exceeds that of most North America-based Southeast Asianists in breadth and depth. Only time in the field will allow this expertise to be fully developed, thereby bringing nuanced evidence to issue of concern in the discipline of political science.

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing job applicants is to differentiate themselves from their co-applicants, who will number in the dozens if not hundreds for competitive tenure-track jobs. The most effective way of doing this is having a strong publication record, especially if it includes high-visibility outlets in the discipline that houses a given position. For that reason, many PhD candidates are encouraged to dedicate a significant portion of their efforts during graduate school to publishing papers.\(^5\) Regardless of publication record, however, a candidate’s application will benefit if they are able to articulate a clear scholarly identity that incorporates elements of thematic expertise (institutions, elections, ethnic politics, etc.) and regional expertise. The many conversations that are integral to fieldwork provide a strong opportunity to work out elements of that identity.

### Professional networks

5. There is a sense that this dynamic has strengthened following the poor job markets during and immediately after the 2008/09 financial crisis, resulting in a publication “arms race” among PhD students. Increasingly, the job market stars (and even some not considered stars) enter the market with three or more publications, some in top journals. Clearly, building a publication record of that kind during graduate school requires an immense and immediate focus on publishing, which is difficult to reconcile with the demands of developing broad regional expertise—especially when language acquisition is required.

Success on the job market is not an individual effort. An applicant’s chances are strengthened when there is a strong team of advocates behind them. This begins with an applicant’s committee, from whom recommendation letters will likely come, and who are best positioned to speak to applicant’s strength during the “feeler” talks that often precede the formal application process. Advocates at other universities can likewise be highly valuable when they are able to support and endorse a candidate.

More broadly, however, it is important to realize that scholarly knowledge is generally advanced by networks of researchers, rather than isolated individuals. As such, departments typically assess applicants in terms of how they fit into existing scholarly networks, which junior scholars are expected to contribute to over the course of their careers. All else equal, the more established an applicant’s position in a recognized and influential existing network, the more competitive they will be. This calls for junior candidates to increase their visibility and disseminate their ideas. Aside from publishing in journals, candidates should actively participate in conferences and workshops relevant to their disciplines and cases. APSA’s Southeast Asia Politics related group, as well as the Southeast Asia Research Group (SEAREG) are excellent examples of this. Publishing in high quality Southeast Asia journals can also increase credibility and visibility. Several, including those based in the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), will be “counted” by many in the discipline, even if discounted somewhat vis-à-vis a disciplinary journal. While they are not peer-review and hence will not “count” as proper publications on the job market, candidates should also consider platforms like New Mandala, The Diplomat, ISEAS Perspective, and The East Asia Forum. These can be effective at disseminating research, increasing visibility, and establishing a place in the relevant professional networks.\(^6\)

It is obvious that fieldwork offers exposure to Southeast Asia-based researchers, but it often also presents surprisingly good opportunities to connect with scholars based in the United States, Europe, or Australia, among others. This is especially the case at places like ISEAS or NUS’s Asia Research Institute (ARI), which regularly draw non-local researchers for talks or longer research visits. As these visiting researchers are typically not teaching, the opportunities for productive conversations are often greater than with meetings at their home universities during the academic year. Clearly, junior scholars should take advantage of those opportunities whenever possible.

### Further thoughts

The job market gives PhD students incentives to write dissertations that address primarily a disciplinary audience. Where possible, they are also pushed to publish in disciplinary journals. Neither of these two aims inherently demands learning about the region beyond the scope of what is necessary to complete those individual projects. It would be easy to conclude from this that PhD candidates should focus only on narrow expertise, leaving the project of broadening their regional knowledge to a later phase of their careers.

6. While this is general rather than Southeast Asia-specific advice, there are strong upsides to having a website prior to the job market. As a candidate’s research gains visibility, many readers will do a quick Google search. A website gives a candidate the opportunity to showcase their skills and indicate the direction of future research.
While job market realities do require prioritizing narrow dissertation case knowledge, they do not preclude building a strong foundation of broader regional knowledge, which again brings numerous tangential benefits. As junior faculty, for example, candidates will likely be called upon to teach a class on broader Southeast Asia—if not East and Southeast Asia combined. Most candidates will also find that there are few other experts on the region in the social sciences at their university, and may thus be asked to field questions on all countries in the region from other faculty members and administration. This goes as well for the advising of graduate students. To be clear, these points are of second order importance to a strong dissertation project when competing on the job market, but they may nonetheless be an asset for a department that has little other Southeast Asia expertise.

While a job in a political science department is the most obvious target for political science PhD candidates, there are additional options within academia that warrant consideration. The most visible of these—not to mention generally the most open to political science PhDs—are policy and foreign service programs, of which places like Georgetown’s School of Foreign Service, UCSD’s School of Global Policy and Strategy, Princeton’s Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, University of British Columbia’s Institute of Asian Research, and University of Washington’s Jackson School of International Studies are just a few. This category of programs is remarkably heterogeneous, making generalizations difficult. Nonetheless, a few basic points can be noted. To begin, the core criteria for being seen as a competitive candidate for policy positions are similar to those in traditional political science departments; in other words, the strongest asset a candidate can bring is an innovative dissertation and a record of (or convincing potential for) publication. Beyond this, there are numerous minor divergences. Unsurprisingly, these begin with a more pronounced preference for policy relevant research vis-à-vis most political science departments. While it is not universally true, many policy schools count policy impact as among the performance evaluation metrics for faculty members. Where this is the case, areas like media engagement, professional networks in Southeast Asia (or within US-based institutions that operate in Southeast Asia), and publications in regional platforms may be directly sought in candidates.

To conclude, the highly competitive nature of the academic job market makes it imperative that job candidates establish a foothold in North American political science networks. Publications in political science journals and a dissertation project that can appeal to non-Southeast Asianists are important components of this. But that disciplinary orientation should not come at the expense of regional expertise, which has benefits both for securing employment and for continued scholarly development.7


**SECTION NEWS**

**Michael Bernhard** began a four-year term as the editor of Perspectives on Politics this June. He published a number of articles this summer and fall, most of them associated with the Varieties of Democracy project.


**Todd Eisenstadt, Carl LeVan, and Tofigh Maboudi** published *Constituents before Assembly: Participation, Deliberation and Representation in the Crafting of New Constitutions* (Cambridge 2017). Using an original dataset of all new constitutions since 1974 and field research from three continents, they demonstrate how participatory constitution-making has lasting benefits for democracy. The dataset is publicly available here.

**Todd A. Eisenstadt** (American University), A. Carl LeVan (American University) and Tofigh Maboudi (Loyola University-Chicago) have published their monograph with Cambridge (2017, in the Comparative Constitutional Law and Policy series): Constituents Before Assembly: Participation, Deliberation, and Representation in the Crafting of New Constitutions. Using a publicly available comprehensive data set they constructed of nearly 250 constitutions implemented over the last 40 years worldwide ([http://dra.american.edu/islandora/object/uislandora%3A65723](http://dra.american.edu/islandora/object/uislandora%3A65723)) and extensive case studies based on archival research and interviews, the authors explain their central finding that deliberation in the earliest stages of constitution-writing improves nations’ levels of democracy, but that deliberative processes (and ratification plebiscites) at later stages of constitution-making have no significant effect on levels of democracy after the constitution is promulgated.

**Kenneth Greene** won the 2017 Franklin L. Burdette/Pi Sigma Alpha Alpha prize for the best paper (among 7,266 papers) presented at the 2016 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association and 2017 Sage Best Paper Award honorable mention from the Comparative Politics Section of the American Political Science Association for “Why Vote Buying Fails: Campaign Effects and the Elusive Swing Voter”.

**Olena Nikolayenko** (associate professor, Fordham University) published the book, Youth Movements and Elections in Eastern Europe (Cambridge University Press, 2017). The book examines why some nonviolent youth movements were more successful than others in mobilizing citizens against the incumbent government in the aftermath of fraudulent elections in five post-communist states: Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Serbia, and Ukraine.

**Jong-Sung YOU**, senior lecturer at the Department of Political and Social Change, Australian National University and visiting professor at Yonsei and Geumgang Universities in Korea, has published:


“Corruption and Inequality in Asia” in Routledge Handbook on Corruption in Asia, edited by Ting Gong and Ian Scott (Routledge), 97-112 (December 2016).

Recent publication for several section members: Nancy Bermeo, Deborah Yashar, Dan Slater, Maya Tudor, Rachel Beatty Riedl, Ken Roberts, Erik Kuhonta, David Waldner, Ellen Lust: “Parties, Movements, and Democracy in the Developing World”

**Best Dissertation Award**

Honorable Mention: Matthew Henry Rhodes-Purdy’s dissertation “Beyond the Balance Sheet: Performance, Participation, and Regime Support in Latin America” (University of Texas, Austin, 2016).

Citation:
Avital Livny’s dissertation, A State of Distrust: Islamic Mobilization in Turkey and the Muslim World, investigates the success of political and economic mobilization in the name of Islam. What, Livny asks, explains increasing support for Islamic parties, the rise of Islamic banking, and the growth of Islamic business associations if levels of religiosity cannot account for these trends? Livny’s explanation centers on Islamic organizations’ promotion of social trust based on shared group identity. Group-based trust, she argues, serves as a valuable substitute where generalized social trust is lacking. The dissertation’s final chapters investigate the sources of low levels of trust across much of the Muslim world. Livny traces widespread distrust to overregulation and uneven implementation of the law, arguing that under such conditions citizens’ lack the information necessary to know whom to trust.

Livny carefully traces each logical step of her argument, building a solid body of empirical support for her theory. The theory is tested using an impressive array of electoral, firm-level, and individual survey data, collected in part during 18 months of fieldwork in Turkey. The resulting empirical breadth of the dissertation is striking. Livny also shows commendable sensitivity to alternative explanations. Economic, cultural, and faith-based explanations are all interrogated, tested, and found wanting. Livny shows that group identity helps to sustain high-risk collective action, party support in a volatile party system, as well as economic cooperation during periods of uncertainty. Last, the dissertation’s theory helps to explain apparently counterintuitive findings, such as the importance of secular voters to the success of Islamic-based parties, like the AKP. The dissertation is remarkably ambitious, theoretically incisive, and empirically persuasive. Its findings shed light on Islam’s power to bolster such key components of democratic society as political participation and voter coordination.

The committee also recognizes with an Honorable Mention the excellent dissertation by Matthew Rhodes-Purdy, “Beyond the Balance Sheet: Performance, Participation, and Regime Support in Latin America.” Rhodes-Purdy tackles a fascinating question: why support for the Chavez regime in Venezuela is so high despite an array of performance failures, while in Chile regime support is puzzlingly low in light of the government’s excellent track record. The answer, Rhodes-Purdy argues, is that citizens independently value the opportunity to participate. Participation, in turn, raises regime support both directly and by blunting the impact of policy failures. The dissertation engages thoughtfully with democratic theory, asks important and timely questions, and offers insightful analysis of Latin American politics that will be of interest to scholars of other regions.

Best Book Award

Citation:
The members of the award committee—Ken Roberts (Cornell University), Jillian Schwedler (Hunter College and the Graduate Center, CUNY), and Tarek Massoud (Harvard Kennedy School)—were deeply impressed with the large number of high-quality books nominated for this award. Altogether we reviewed 34 books that analyzed democratization and political regimes from a wide range of theoretical and methodological approaches. We felt that a number of these books were deserving of recognition, and we found it very difficult to narrow our choice down to a single volume. In the end, we decided to share the award between the authors of two superb books: Sheena Chestnut Greitens’ Dictators and Their Secret Police: Coercive Institutions and State Violence, published by Cambridge University Press in 2016, and Stephan Haggard and Robert R. Kaufman’s Dictators and Democrats: Masses, Elites, and Regime Change, published by Princeton University Press in 2016. Between them, these two books greatly enrich our understanding of authoritarian institutions, democratic transitions, and regime durability.

Dictators and Their Secret Police: Coercive Institutions and State Violence by Sheena Chestnut Greitens is a pathbreaking study of authoritarian regimes and the coercive institutions that sustain them in power. For all the literature generated by the study of authoritarianism, relatively little work has focused on the role of secret police forces, or the ways in which coercive institutions shape the character, durability, and repressiveness of authoritarian rule. Chestnut Greitens not only corrects for these oversights, but also develops a strikingly original theoretical account of variation in coercive institutions. Drawing from intensive field research in South Korea, Taiwan, and the Philippines, her book explains why dictators build coercive institutions that vary in their levels of organizational fragmentation (or centralization) and social exclusiveness. It then employs the tools of comparative historical analysis to explain why this variation matters—namely, because these institutional properties heavily condition the durability of authoritarian regimes and their use of violence against the civilian population.

At the heart of Chestnut Greitens’ account is what she calls the “coercive dilemma”—
the fact that dictators face organizational tradeoffs in guarding against different kinds of political threats. Dictators are threatened by elite rivals who may be capable of organizing a coup, but they also face the potential threat of popular rebellion "from below." The dilemma, then, is that the kinds of coercive institutions that provide "coup proofing" are less effective at protecting dictators from popular rebellions. Coup proofing against elite rivals is best provided by coercive institutions—including military forces, secret police, intelligence services, presidential guards, etc.—that are "internally fragmented and socially exclusive." Such attributes make it difficult to coordinate elite opposition and risky to defect from incumbent authority. Managing popular unrest, however, requires a more "unitary" security apparatus with "broadly embedded, social inclusive intelligence networks." Given the organizational tradeoffs between these two forms of incumbent protection, dictators are likely to build coercive institutions that respond most effectively to the dominant perceived threat when they first come to power.

Crucially, these different types of coercive institutions subsequently shape the use of violence by authoritarian regimes. Fragmented and socially exclusive coercive institutions that are designed for protection from elite threats create professional and social incentives to use higher levels of violence, and they reduce the ability "to engage in pre-emptive, discriminate, and targeted forms of repression." Conversely, and in many respects counter-intuitively, more unitary and socially inclusive coercive institutions designed for protection against popular threats allow autocrats to use more targeted and discriminate forms of repression.

Chestnut Greitens takes great care to assess alternative explanations, and she marshals an impressive array of historical data to test her own hypotheses and trace the causal mechanisms at work across three Asian cases. Her book is a superb example of how the tools of comparative historical analysis can be used to explain how actor interests and strategic choices shape the origins and development of political institutions, and how these institutions in turn condition political behavior. For anyone who seeks to understand the inner workings of authoritarian regimes, the political logic behind their use of violence, and the sources of their durability and fragility, Dictators and Their Secret Police is an essential place to start.

In Dictators and Democrats: Masses, Elites, and Regime Change, Stephan Haggard and Robert Kaufman address two of the most enduring questions in the study of comparative politics: transitions to and from democracy. Remarkably, they are able to bring fresh insights, original theoretical reasoning, and cutting-edge multi-method empirical analysis to longstanding debates about the relationships between economic development, social inequalities, and political regimes. In so doing, they steer scholarly debates about the origins and stability of democracy "away from structural explanations" and "back toward more political accounts," with a focus on the nature of institutions, regime performance, and the capacities for collective action in civil society.

Although Dictators and Democrats draws from a number of different theoretical traditions, it engages in an especially fruitful dialogue with rational choice models that see the origins of democracy in distributive conflicts between elites and masses. Through an exhaustive global study of 78 democratic transitions and 25 democratic reversions between 1980 and 2008, Haggard and Kaufman demonstrate that distributive conflict, while not uncommon, is hardly a generalizable determinant of transitions to or from democracy. Indeed, many democratic transitions have origins in intra-elite conflicts or preemptive strategic calculations, rather than popular mobilization "from below," given the collective action problems that typically impede the latter. Democratic breakdowns, moreover, are rarely triggered by elite reactions to the efforts of popular democratic governments to redistribute income or property; instead, democratic breakdowns are more typically attributable to institutional weaknesses, or what Haggard and Kaufman call a "weak democracy syndrome" characterized by praetorianism, periodic economic crises, and under-institutionalization.

Haggard and Kaufman conduct a series of sophisticated cross-national statistical tests of the social, political, and economic determinants of democratic transitions and reversions, and they enrich these tests with causal process observations from a wide range of cases in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and post-Communist Eurasia. Along the way, they provide an encyclopedic panoramic overview of democracy's "third wave," while breaking new ground theoretically and empirically in the study of regime transitions. Although this book is breathtaking in its scope and ambition, it is also deceptively straightforward in its authoritative conclusion—namely, that there exist multiple pathways to political democracy. Conditions can be identified that make democratization more or less likely and stable, but even on inhospitable terrain democracy can be built. That is an important lesson for aspiring democrats in many parts of the world—and surely a very hopeful one.

**Best Article Award:**


Section News

Citation:
“Deliver the Vote! Micromotives and Macrobehavior in Electoral Fraud”
This paper proposes an ingenious explanation for the odd way in which electoral fraud is often used by authoritarian incumbents. Quite often, leaders who are genuinely popular and could almost certainly win big victories in honest elections nevertheless commit fraud—and win with implausibly high vote shares. Such obvious cheating would seem to reduce their legitimacy. So why do they do it? Rundlett and Svolik attribute this to the ruler’s difficulties in controlling his agents, who are the ones who do the actual ballot stuffing. If the ruler loses the election, then agents who cheated the most are likely to get punished. If, on the other hand, the ruler wins, then those who stuff more will be generously rewarded. This creates the incentive for agents to stuff more when the ruler is genuinely popular, and to stuff less when they doubt his viability. There is, at the same time, a coordination problem for the agents—if the others stuff, you want to stuff; if the others do not, you also would rather not. Thus, the fraud is likely to be excessive when the leader doesn’t need it, and inadequate when he does. The authors develop a “global games” model of this herd dynamic and then demonstrate, exploring anomalies in the returns from Russia’s 2011-12 elections, that fraud did occur precisely in precincts where the ruling team was more popular. In short, it is a clever argument that makes sense of a real world puzzle, with both formal demonstration of the logic and empirical evidence of its explanatory power. And it has an important implication: the herd dynamic that characterizes behavior of dictators’ agents tends to render these regimes much more fragile than they might appear.

“Crafting Counterrevolution: How Reactionaries Learned to Combat Change in 1848”
We are used to hearing about waves of democratization and revolution. But what about waves of counterrevolution? Exploiting fascinating archival materials on the aftermath of Europe’s 1848 uprisings, Kurt Weyland examines the very different ways in which first revolution and then counterrevolution spread across the continent. Whereas revolution swept from France eastward seemingly faster than horses could travel, the subsequent reaction advanced more gradually, with sequential counterattacks launched at different times in different capitals. Besides documenting this, Weyland explores how leaders benefited from examples in neighboring countries. Interrogating the relevant memoirs, diaries, and histories, he shows how the Prussian king attempted to time his restoration of authority in a way that would exploit the decline of revolutionary enthusiasm and split bourgeoisie from workers. Whereas a revolution, to be effective, has to move fast, a counterrevolution can make use of the learning that accrues over time. The paper is a masterful use of a historical case to illuminate the way in which cognitive factors can either advance or stall democratization.

Best Paper Prize:
Winners:

Best Fieldwork Award:
Winners: Nicholas Barnes’ (PhD Candidate, University of Wisconsin, Madison) study on “Monopolies of Violence: Gang Governance in Rio de Janeiro”

Citation:
The committee was unanimous in selecting Nicholas Barnes as the winner of the Comp Democratization section’s Best Fieldwork award for the fieldwork for his dissertation titled “Monopolies of Violence: Gang Governance in Rio de Janeiro”. Barnes’s work sheds new light on the political impact...
of criminal organizations, such as inner city gangs, in Rio de Janeiro, and it also elaborates on the ways that these extra-legal institutions shape state formation, city governance, and services delivery in the particularly difficult research context of Rio de Janeiro’s slums. Drawing on almost three years of careful fieldwork and an inventive marshalling of several different kinds of data, Barnes examines interactions between gangs, the state, and residents of the favelas where gangs operate in order to understand variation in the way that gangs govern their territories. His work concludes that gangs tend to provide more public goods to residents when they operate in more precarious security environments. He suggests that, when gangs are under pressures from state surveillance and enforcement, they need the support of citizens and are therefore more accountable to these constituencies. On the other hand, when gangs face less competition from rivals and less pressure from police, gangs are more coercive and more predatory. The fieldwork part of this work included extended immersion in the large and diverse favela complex of Maré, first-hand observation of interactions between gangs and citizens, and interviews with community leaders as well as with gang members. In addition to this qualitative data, Barnes drew on archival work, surveys of citizens and gang members in the favela where he worked, and a unique dataset of over 21,000 anonymous hotline denunciations that Barnes was able to link to areas of residence in Maré. The committee was impressed by the mix of quantitative and qualitative methods used in this dissertation, as well as the careful ethnographic work upon which the dissertation rests.
**Editorial Committee**

**APSA-CD** is the official newsletter of the American Political Science Association’s Comparative Democratization section. Formerly known as **CompDem**, it has been published three times a year since 2003. In October 2010, the newsletter was renamed **APSA-CD** and expanded to include substantive articles on democracy, as well as news and notes on the latest developments in the field. The newsletter is jointly produced and edited by faculty members of the V-Dem Institute.

**Executive Editor**

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**Adam Harris** received his Ph.D. from New York University in August 2015. He specializes in ethnic and African politics. Adam has conducted research on ethnic identifiability (recently published in the Journal of Conflict Resolution), ethnic and immigrant prejudice, the determinants of political protests, ideological ideal point estimation among African legislators, and the effects of foreign aid in recipient countries. His research has been supported by the National Science Foundation, New York University, and Columbia University.

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