Sahila Kudalkar
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Date: January 31, 2026

To,
The Innovation Research Boot Camp Selection Committee,
National Bureau of Economic Research.

Dear Members of the Selection Committee,

I am applying to the NBER Innovation Research Boot Camp in July 2026. I am a third-year PhD student in the Sustainable Development program at Columbia University, working at the intersection of the economics of science and innovation and political economy, with a focus on science policy in developing countries.

My research analyzes how institutional and regulatory constraints in developing countries shape the direction of scientific growth and innovation. One of my current projects studies how declining academic freedom in India affects research productivity in public universities, while a second analyzes how global biodiversity protection policies influence innovation in fields reliant on biological materials. Together, these projects highlight trade-offs between governance, public goods provision, and incentives for knowledge creation in developing-country contexts.

The boot camp will be valuable in helping me sharpen the theoretical framing and empirical strategies of my work, particularly through exposure to frontier research in the field and through sustained engagement with faculty and peer researchers.

My letter of recommendation will be submitted by Dr. Suresh Naidu (sn2430@columbia.edu) at the Dept. of Economics, Columbia University.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Sahila Kudalkar

Essay

I am a third year PhD student in the Sustainable Development program at the School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University. My research interests lie in the economics of science and innovation, and political economy. Specifically, I am interested in science policy in developing countries. My work so far has explored how modern institutions shape the rate and direction of science, particularly through their effects on the productivity of scientists and firms.

My first project examines how declining academic freedom in India has influenced research productivity of university scientists. This study is motivated by the apparent paradox that rising authoritarianism in countries like China and India has not diminished their expanding global scientific footprint. Focusing on India, I analyze how government control over public university leaders affects faculty careers at those university. I find a decline in research productivity and impact among faculty at public universities relative to comparable private university faculty. In the next stage of this project, I plan to engage directly with the reality that science policy in developing countries is often oriented toward human capital formation, and examine the labor market outcomes of graduates from these universities. The NBER boot camp will offer an important opportunity to engage directly with researchers such as Kyle Myers, whose work on the elasticity of science directly informs my research on scientists' sensitivity to non-wage amenities such as academic freedom.

A second study analyzes the effects of a global biodiversity treaty —one that established property rights over biological resources —on innovation. This question is motivated by the core trade-offs in public goods provision, highlighting how policies designed to protect biodiversity may inadvertently reshape the production of scientific knowledge. Here, I am testing whether innovation slowed down in fields reliant on wild-sourced biological materials, using gene patenting activity as measure of innovation. Because most signatory countries are also developing countries, the study hopes to highlight the tensions between redistributing gains from bioprospecting and maintaining incentives for domestic innovation. My research would benefit from engaging with researchers such as Pierre Azoulay, whose work on lower returns to risky research provides a framework to understand how firms respond to uncertainty in R&D inputs.

Broadly, my research is motivated by inequalities in scientific production between the Global North and the Global South, and by the role of policy in shaping knowledge creation across these regions. In future work, I plan to study how research infrastructure influences collaboration networks and the formation of cross-national scientific ties. A second strand of my work lies in the political economy of science, examining how political incentives shape the direction of research. Ultimately, I aim to link these dynamics to economic growth and to assess their broader societal consequences.

I am eager to participate in the NBER Innovation Research Bootcamp this summer to engage deeply with frontier work in innovation economics. This spring, I am taking the Institute for Progress course in science and innovation economics with NBER-affiliated researchers, which strengthens my grounding in the literature and empirical strategies. The NBER Innovation Research Bootcamp would complement this training by offering sustained interaction with leading scholars and peers in a focused environment. Attending the NBER Summer Institute Innovation Policy meeting would further allow me to engage with emerging research and researchers whose work directly informs my own.

SAHILA KUDALKAR

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RESEARCH INTERESTS

Economics of science, innovation, political economy, biodiversity

EDUCATION

School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University — **NY, NY**
PhD in Sustainable Development — August 2023 - ongoing

Harris School of Public Policy, University of Chicago — **Chicago, IL**
Masters in Public Policy — June 2023

State University of New York, College of Env Sci. & Forestry — **Syracuse, NY**
M.S. Environmental & Forest Biology — December 2016

Mumbai University, D.J. Sanghvi College of Engineering — **Mumbai, IN**
B.E. Electronics Engineering — June 2011

WORK IN PROGRESS

- The Silent Campus: Career costs of declining academic freedom
- Innovation or Conservation?: The Nagoya protocol's impact on innovation in R&D
- Disadvantaged incumbents: The impact of extreme weather on voting behavior in India (with Suresh Naidu and Nicolas Longuet-Marx)
- Community rights and mining in India (with Sushant Banjara)

PUBLICATIONS

Conservation Biology & Ecology journals

- Kudalkar S.*, Verrissimo D. (2024). From media campaign to local governance transition: Lessons for community-based conservation from an Amur falcon hunting ban in Nagaland, India. Conservation Science and Practice, 6(8): e13191.
- Srivastava P., Muthanna P.M., Kudalkar S.* (2020). Privately funded land purchase programme in Pushpagiri Wildlife Sanctuary, India. Oryx, 54(2): 151
- Karanth K.K., Kudalkar S.,* Jain S. (2018). Re-building communities: Voluntary resettlement from wildlife reserves in India. Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution, 6(183)
- Karanth K.K., Kudalkar S.* (2017). History, location, and species matter: Insights for human-wildlife conflict mitigation from India. Human Dimensions of Wildlife, 22(4): 331-246

AWARDS

- Dean's Fellowship, Columbia University, 2023-2024
- College Core Writing Tutor Award, The University of Chicago, 2022
- Academic Scholarship, Harris School of Public Policy, 2021-23
- Wildlife Conservation Society C.V. Starr Tiger Conservation Fellowship, 2018 (1/8 recipients across 55 countries)
- Fellow, Small Grants Program, Inlaks Shivdasani Foundation, 2018 (1/5 recipients across India)
- JN Tata Endowment Scholarship, 2012-2013 (1/113 recipients across India)
- Dorabji Tata Trust Scholarship, 2009-2010 (merit-based award for top undergraduate performance)
- JRD Tata Trust Scholarship, 2008-2009 (merit-based award for top undergraduate performance)
- National Talent Search Scholar, 2005 (1/1000 recipients across India)

SKILLS

- Data analysis: R, Stata, Python, NVivo
- Spatial data analysis: Google Earth Engine, QGIS, ArcGIS

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RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY **New York, NY**

Research Assistant (Dr. Suresh Naidu) June 2025 – ongoing

- Examined social security and employment patterns using the Employees Provident Fund dataset in India

Research Assistant (Dr. Suresh Naidu) June 2024 – December 2024

- Examined the impacts of weather shocks on voter behavior and political incumbency in India over 1977-2024

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO **Chicago, IL**

Bartlett Fellow (Dr. Eyal Frank) September 2022 – December 2022

- Developed a balance tables and generated difference-in-differences estimates of the impact of DDT on infant mortality using within-group variation in crop and cotton production in study sites, as part of the study: The 'Golden Age' of Pesticides? Trade-offs of DDT and Health in the US

EPIC Faculty Fellow (Dr. Eyal Frank) June 2022 – August 2022

- Extracted spatial data on agricultural variables, developed maps of spatial distribution of landscape metrics associated with insecticide use and ran leave-one-out regressions using packages *sf, sp, rgdal, ggplot2* in R and Stata.

Research Assistant (Dr. Eyal Frank) January 2022 – June 2022

- Standardized medical, education, employment and age data from the Government of India Census 1991 database using R packages *dplyr*, *foreign* for the study: The Social Costs of Keystone Species Collapse: Evidence From The Decline of Vultures in India

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY **New York, NY**

Teaching Assistant January 2026 – May 2026

- Economic Development for International Affairs

Teaching Assistant January 2025 – May 2025

- Economic Development for International Affairs

THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK **Syracuse, NY**

Teaching Assistant January 2016 – December 2016

- Genetics, Marine Ecology

POPULAR ARTICLES

- Kudalkar S.*, Verrissimo D. (2024). The path to community-led conservation: The Amur falcon story. Current Conservation.
- Verrissimo D., Kudalkar S.* (2024). An Indian village went from hunting Amur falcons to being their biggest protectors. Here's how conservationists can harness the power of persuasion. The Conversation

WORK EXPERIENCE

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION SOCIETY, INDIA **Bengaluru, Karnataka**

Conservation Director June 2018 – August 2021

- Directed a 20-member interdisciplinary Counter Wildlife Trafficking team across 14 states of India, has contributed to arrests of 100+ wildlife criminals in 2019-'21
- Trained 200+ officers from Forest Department, Customs, Police and security forces on legal procedures following detection of a wildlife crime
- Liaised with 10 government agencies to catalyze enforcement action against illegal wildlife trade
- Drafted 4 grant proposals to raise funds worth approximately US$ 3mn for program activities (2018-2022)

PhD coursework

Course Name	Semester
Economics	
Microeconomic Analysis I	Fall 2023
Introduction to Econometrics I	Fall 2023
Macroeconomic Analysis I	Fall 2023
Microeconomic Analysis II	Spring 2024
Introduction to Econometrics II	Spring 2024
Human Ecology	Spring 2024
Collective Action in Global Sustainable Development	Spring 2024
Labor Economics I	Fall 2024
Political Economy I	Fall 2024
Political Economy II	Spring 2024
Public Economics and Development	Spring 2024
Environment and Resource Economics	Spring 2026
Economics of Ideas, Science and Innovation*	Spring 2026
Natural Sciences	
Environmental Science for Sustainable Development	Fall 2023
Theoretical Ecology	Fall 2024
Landscape Analysis	Spring 2025
Principles & applications of modern DNA sequencing	Spring 2026

*Institute of Progress course. The rest of the coursework was at Columbia University.

February 12, 2026

Dear NBER innovation group,

I'm writing to recommend **Sahila Kuldakar**, a 3rd year Sustainable Development PhD, for the Innovation summer school. She is working on very interesting projects around the international treaties for the patenting of rare plant material, and the impact on source country innovation. She also has another project on the effects of restricting academic freedom on scientific research, using university variation in India.

Please feel free to contact me at sn2430@columbia.edu or 212 854 0027 with any questions.

Suresh Naidu
Jack Wang and Echo Ren Professor of Economics
Columbia University