



Why Regional Parties?: Clientelism, Elites, and the Indian Party System

By Adam Ziegfeld

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Today, regional parties in India win nearly as many votes as national parties. In *Why Regional Parties?*, Professor Adam Ziegfeld questions the conventional wisdom that regional parties in India are electorally successful because they harness popular grievances and benefit from strong regional identities. He draws on a wide range of quantitative and qualitative evidence from over eighteen months of field research to demonstrate that regional parties are, in actuality, successful because they represent expedient options for office-seeking politicians. By focusing on clientelism, coalition government, and state-level factional alignments, Ziegfeld explains why politicians in India find membership in a regional party appealing. He therefore accounts for the remarkable success of India's regional parties and, in doing so, outlines how party systems take root and evolve in democracies where patronage, vote buying, and machine politics are common.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Ziegfeld's book innovates both in research on party systems in general and Indian democracy in particular. He provides a novel elite-centered explanation for the rise of "regional" parties that do not cover the whole of a country's electoral districts, even though they are not grounded in demand-side "regionalist" ethno-cultural or political identities. Furthermore, he explains why regional parties are more likely to emphasize clientelist relations with their voters. Finally, he applies this theory to India to account for the presence and expansion of regional political parties to the detriment of national parties with the advent of national coalition governments. Students of political parties across all regions of the world will benefit from absorbing this exemplary investigation just as much as those aspiring to understand the challenges faced by India as the world's largest democracy in the twenty-first century."

Herbert Kitschelt, Duke University, North Carolina

"Why do regional parties emerge and thrive in certain countries but not others? How does their rise affect levels of democratic representation and accountability within developing democracies? In this fascinating and valuable study, Ziegfeld argues that regional parties do not emerge because disappointed voters demand alternatives to poorly performing national parties. Instead, regional parties are deliberately crafted by political elites because of advantages such formations enjoy within decentralized, clientelistic, and fragmented electoral arenas across the developing world. Ziegfeld's argument is primarily based on meticulous research from India, from which he skillfully derives broader insights for understanding this important, yet understudied, class of political parties. The book thus deserves attention from scholars broadly interested in political parties, elections, and clientelism, as well as those specifically concerned with the maturation of the world's largest democracy."

Tariq Thachil, Yale University, Connecticut

About the Author

Adam Ziegfeld is the International Council Assistant Professor of Political Science and International Affairs at the George Washington University, Washington DC. His research explores electoral and party politics, particularly India. Adam received his PhD from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and previously held postdoctoral positions at the University of Oxford and the University of Chicago.

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