

Advance Praise

In this detailed account of government responses to credibility crises, Bilal Baloch sheds new light on a key element of decision-making, the cohesion of elite ideas. Focusing on corruption allegations in India, he shows how leaders' perceptions of the status and appropriate role of the state can have important implications for the ability of those elites to respond to external critiques. Through the use of elite interview and archival research based process tracing on two key moments in India's contemporary political history, Baloch offers a compelling perspective that goes well beyond theories of material interests.

—**Jennifer Bussell**, University of California, Berkeley,
author of *Corruption and Reform in India: Public Services in the Digital Age*

When Ideas Matter is a deeply researched and engagingly written book. It addresses an unusual but vital question: How do the ideas of elites actually shape politics and policy and their ability to negotiate the contradictions of society? It is also a wonderful contribution to contemporary history, by smartly putting into comparative perspective the anti-corruption movement against Indira Gandhi's Congress with the movement against UPA-II. In doing so Bilal Baloch sheds new light on how ideas work in politics, the nature of political elites, the shape of party structures and the future of populism.

—**Pratap Bhanu Mehta**, Princeton University, co-editor of
Rethinking Public Institutions in India

Bilal Baloch makes a powerful constructivist case for the importance of ideas in explaining key outcomes and crises in post-Independence Indian history, from the secular nationalist era of the 1970s to the Hindu nationalist present.

—**Steven Wilkinson**, Yale University, author of
Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India

Methodologically sophisticated and groundbreaking.... A pioneering contribution to the study of Indian politics, this book's importance lies in the sophisticated manner in which it unravels the ideological motivations behind the actions of our politicians.

—*The Book Review*, vol. XLVI, no. 4

As a reader progresses with the book, the author's arguments seem more convincing. The strength of this book is the rich resources, used and referenced, in it.... With his commendable research work, the author has given us some unrevealed facts about the two political movements that, in the garb of fighting corruption, in reality, became an instrument in the hands of communal right-wing forces in their pursuit of taking over the Indian polity.

—*Economic & Political Weekly*, vol. LVII, no. 18

Many readers will delight in the ways *When Ideas Matter* opens the black box of public policy formation ... the book approaches the examination of political decisions from a novel perspective in more ways than one.

—*Democracy Paradox*

When Ideas Matter

How do ideas shape government decision-making? Comparativist scholarship conventionally gives unbridled primacy to external, material interests—chiefly votes and rents—as proximately shaping political behavior. These logics tend to explicate elite decision-making around elections and pork barrel politics but fall short in explaining political conduct during credibility crises, such as democratic governments facing anti-corruption movements. In these instances, Baloch shows, elite ideas, for example concepts of the nation or technical diagnoses of socioeconomic development, dominate policymaking. Scholars leverage these arguments in the fields of international relations, American politics, and the political economy of development. But an account of ideas activating or constraining executive action in developing democracies, where material pressures are high, is found wanting. Resting on fresh archival research and over 120 original elite interviews, *When Ideas Matter* traces where ideas come from, how they are chosen, and when they are most salient for explaining political behavior in India and similar contexts.

Bilal A. Baloch is a political scientist and visiting scholar at the Center for the Advanced Study of India (CASI), University of Pennsylvania, where he taught at the Lauder Institute, Wharton School of Business. His research interests cover the political economy of government decision-making and intellectual history with a focus on South Asia and the Middle East and North Africa. He studied at the London School of Economics, The Fletcher School, and the University of Oxford, where he received his doctorate in politics. Bilal is the co-founder and co-CEO of Enquire AI, a software company that uses artificial intelligence to verify and deliver expert insights to organizations worldwide. A London native, he now lives in Washington, D.C.

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When Ideas Matter

Democracy and Corruption in India

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or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this
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*For my untiring parents,
Hassina Baloch and Mohammed Bux Baloch*

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Preface

How do ideas shape government decision-making? Comparativist scholarship conventionally gives unbridled primacy to external, material interests—chiefly votes and rents—as proximately shaping political behavior. These logics tend to explicate elite decision-making around elections and pork barrel politics but fall short in explaining political conduct during credibility crises, such as democratic governments facing anti-corruption movements. In these instances of high political uncertainty, I argue in this book, elite ideas, for example concepts of the nation or technical diagnoses of socioeconomic development, dominate policymaking. Scholars leverage these arguments in the fields of international relations, American politics, and the political economy of development. But an account of ideas activating or constraining executive action in developing democracies, where material pressures are high, is found wanting. The purpose of this book is to trace where ideas come from, how they are chosen, and when they are most salient for explaining political behavior in India and similar contexts including Brazil, Turkey, and Indonesia.

The empirical analysis in this book delves into government response to two movements from contemporary Indian history in order to examine political behavior during the broader credibility crisis. The suppressive response of decision-makers in the Congress Party government to the Jayaprakash Narayan, or JP, protests that brought to a crescendo a credibility crisis in 1975; and the negotiated concessions of elites in the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance coalition to the India Against Corruption (IAC) protests that illustrated the credibility crisis faced by that government in 2012.

The contemporary case relies on over 120 elite interviews from the period including Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, cabinet ministers, party leaders, and senior bureaucrats. The historical case is rooted in deep archival research into over 4,000 documents of official government records and memos, meeting minutes, and private diaries and letters across three national archives (India, US, and UK). I have also conducted a forensic study of daily newspaper reports covering both periods. The project utilizes fresh process-tracing methods and “thick” description to tell a narrative causal story.

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I am also fortunate to have studied South Asia, a deeply composite part of our world, at the altar of two of its leading thinkers. Ayesha Jalal was my co-advisor at Fletcher, and it is in her classroom where my interest in the study of the region thrived. Ayesha's broad and exquisite brushstrokes of the subcontinent's history, society, and politics first presented me with its mosaics that I went on to explore during graduate work. As her student and teaching assistant I developed the tools needed to conduct research on contemporary South Asia as well as the pedagogy of the subject. My doctoral dissertation was turned into a book manuscript during my time as a postdoctoral fellow at the Center for the Advanced Study of India (CASI) at the University of Pennsylvania, where I had the privilege of working with Devesh Kapur. Devesh has picked up the moniker *guru-ji* from a globally spread community of students, academics, and policymakers. True to this nickname, he has been a formidable intellectual guide, going far beyond India and always nudging the utilization of a wider world of referencing in research. I am thankful to Devesh for bringing me to CASI and for peeling back layers in the study of decision-making in India that I otherwise would not have discovered.

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My regional interest has strengthened during the writing of this book due to my exposure to leading debates and methods in comparative politics, for which I must thank the inimitable Nancy Bermeo. From encouraging me to undertake my doctoral studies at Oxford to being a constant source of academic inspiration, scholarly creativity, and, above all, perspective on work–life balance, I could not have wished for a more ideal dissertation supervisor. Her focus on theory, piercing analysis, as well as prompt reading and parsimonious edits have taught me a lot about advanced research and, for that, I am tremendously appreciative. Relatedly, St. Antony's College, Nuffield College, and the Department of Politics and International Relations at Oxford were the most vibrant incubators to conduct graduate studies. I am thankful to them, among other reasons, for generous research and travel grants including the Norman Chester, Andrew W. Mellon, and College awards.

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Fieldwork has been a critical component of this book and the most energizing. Conducting over 120 interviews and excavating libraries and national archives in three countries became testing and required bandwidth that was largely enabled by some fascinating and generous people, such as: John Lipsky, David Sloan, Nader Mousavizadeh, Pramath Raj Sinha, and Pratap Bhanu Mehta. They all gave up valuable time and energy to provide comments and feedback on my topic and played an instrumental role in helping me navigate institutions and interviewees that became the bedrock for data collection in my project. In this regard, I must give a special mention to Montek Singh Ahluwalia and the late Isher Judge Ahluwalia, both of whom gave me impartial and critical access to their own reflections, network, and time.

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In ninth grade, my final English exam asked students to write about an inspirational figure. While friends plucked footballers, musicians, and world leaders from their imagination, I wrote about my brother. This episode has since been a point of humor and awkwardness for us both in its re-telling. However, there is no doubt he hacked down the jungle in order to clear my path through it, and has been my head cheerleader ever since I can remember. I hope this book goes some way to repaying his endless faith in me.

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Abbreviations

AAP	Aam Aadmi Party
ABVP	Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad
AIADMK	All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
AICC	All India Congress Committee
FBL	All India Forward Bloc
AIMIM	All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen
TMC	All India Trinamool Congress
ADR	Association for Democratic Reforms
BSP	Bahujan Samaj Party
BJS	Bharatiya Jana Sangh
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BLD	Bharatiya Lok Dal
BJD	Biju Janata Dal
CBI	Central Bureau of Investigation
CIC	Central Information Commission
CVC	Central Vigilance Commission
CPA	Centre for Policy Alternatives
CEC	Chief Election Commissioner
CMP	Common Minimum Programme
CWG	Commonwealth Games
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPI(M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CAG	Comptroller and Auditor General
CII	Confederation of Indian Industry
CSP	Congress Socialist Party
CWC	Congress Working Committee
CID	Crime Investigation Department
DTC	Delhi Transport Corporation
DIG	Deputy Inspector General
DMK	Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
DSE	Delhi School of Economics

ABBREVIATIONS

FICCI	Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry
FIR	first information report
GOM	Group of Ministers
IAC	India Against Corruption
IAS	Indian Administrative Service
INC	Indian National Congress
IUML	Indian Union Muslim League
IB	Intelligence Bureau
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JKNC	Jammu and Kashmir National Conference
JD(S)	Janata Dal (Secular)
JNU	Jawaharlal Nehru University
JPM	Jayaprakash Narayan Movement
JMM	Jharkhand Mukti Morcha
JVM	Jharkhand Vikas Morcha
MISA	Maintenance of Internal Security Act
MKSS	Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan
MRTPL	Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act
NAC	National Advisory Council
NCPRI	National Campaign for People's Right to Information
NCC	National Coordination Committee
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NIC	National Innovation Council
NREGA	National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
NCP	Nationalist Congress Party
NMML	Nehru Memorial Museum and Library
ORF	Observer Research Foundation
PCC	Pradesh Congress Committee
PSP	Praja Socialist Party
PMEAC	Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council
PMH	Prime Minister's House
PMO	Prime Minister's Office
PPP	public-private partnership
RJD	Rashtriya Janata Dal
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
RBI	Reserve Bank of India
RSP	Revolutionary Socialist Party
RTE	Right to Education

ABBREVIATIONS

RTI	Right to Information
SP	Samajwadi Party
<i>SCR</i>	<i>Shah Commission Report</i>
TMC	Trinamool Congress
TRS	Telangana Rashtra Samithi
TRAI	Telecom Regulatory Authority of India
UN	United Nations
UPA	United Progressive Alliance

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