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978-1-107-12887-3 - Democratization from Above: The Logic of Local Democracy in the Developing World

Anjali Thomas Bohlken

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Democratization from Above

The Logic of Local Democracy in the Developing World

Democratization from Above seeks to explain why some national and state governments in the developing world introduce reforms to make local governance more democratic while others neglect or actively undermine democracy at local levels of government. The study challenges conventional wisdom that local democratization is implemented as a means of granting more autonomy to local actors. Instead, Anjali Bohlken argues that local democratization offers higher level government elites who lack control over party organizational networks an alternative means of increasing the effectiveness of local intermediaries on whom these elites rely to mobilize political support. The book starts with a focus on India and uses original data, and a combination of qualitative and quantitative evidence, to show support for the argument. The study then relies on an original cross-national dataset to show how the argument helps explain the variation in the implementation of local democratization reforms across the developing world.

Anjali Thomas Bohlken is an assistant professor in the department of political science at the University of British Columbia. She received her Ph.D. from New York University in 2010. Bohlken specializes in comparative politics and political economy with an emphasis on India.

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*The Logic of Local Democracy in the
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ANJALI THOMAS BOHLKEN

University of British Columbia



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This book is the culmination of a long intellectual journey that began in 2008. Early that year, I visited the state of Kerala with the goal of trying to understand the recent developmental successes in the state. Virtually every conversation I had, whether with a politician or bureaucrat or citizen, highlighted in some way the excitement around a set of reforms known as the People's Plan that had greatly strengthened grassroots democracy in the state and expanded the scope of participatory decision-making. While there were a number of ongoing studies on the effectiveness of these reforms, my attention was drawn to the puzzling question of why the state government of Kerala chose to implement these reforms at that particular moment. As I explored further, none of the conventional or immediately obvious explanations seemed to hold much weight, and so began my quest for unraveling the puzzle of why governments at higher levels might sometimes choose to strengthen democracy at the local level. This puzzle formed the basis of my doctoral dissertation that I completed while at NYU and now forms the basis of the current book.

From the very beginning stages of this research enterprise, there have been many people who have contributed a great deal to this project. First and foremost, the politics department at NYU provided me with a wonderful set of mentors and colleagues to whom I am very grateful. Kanchan Chandra and David Stasavage, who served as my dissertation committee co-chairs, gave their wholehearted support to this project despite the fact that it entailed a departure from my original plans. Their advice and insights along the way not only helped improve the project but also have contributed immensely to my growth as a scholar. Neal Beck and Adam Przeworski have also been excellent mentors. Neal has been a consistent source of encouragement and support throughout my graduate school career and beyond. Working with Adam has been inspiring and the guidance and training I have received from him continue to have a tremendous impact on my scholarship. I am also very grateful to several

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