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Maya Tudor, University of Oxford

'Imagining Citizens: How Egalitarian Nationalism Supports Democracy' (with Dan Slater)

Abstract:

Competition is so central to our conception of democratic consolidation that some scholars have defined democracy as “a system in which parties lose elections” and democratic consolidation as two handovers of power between competing parties. Yet in democracies as diverse as Botswana, Italy, India, and Japan, the same dominant party won elections for decades and made perpetual losers out of opposition parties. Why are some dominant party democracies able to impede the rise of viable electoral competition? In this article, we show that variation in timing of opposition government emergence can be significantly explained by the presence of substantial and continuous political competition from the colonial period and the presence of a single dominant social cleavage across the state. We develop this argument by exploiting the subnational variation in opposition government emergence in India, one of the oldest developing-world democracies.