

Refereed article

From Lawbreakers to Lawmakers: The Subnational Dimension of Political Malfeasance and the Criminalization of Indian Electoral Politics

Malte Pehl*

Summary

This study examines the extent and the correlates of the increased entry of persons with alleged or proven criminal backgrounds into Indian electoral and representative politics, as “tainted” candidates and elected national legislators. It confirms the previously perceived trend of an increase in the number and share of tainted national-level politicians active in the country from 2004 onward. A state-level analysis of information about candidates, legislators, as well as the regional social and political contexts shows that larger shares of tainted national MPs elected from particular federal states are in part a function of larger shares of tainted candidates running in the respective states’ electoral districts, and of the average level of competitiveness of the electoral contests in those states. These are themselves strongly correlated with the shares of state-level legislators (MLAs) with criminal backgrounds. Non-national political parties and smaller national parties are more likely to count tainted legislators among their MPs, although both the Indian National Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party have over the years consistently produced large numbers of tainted national legislators themselves.

Manuscript received on 2015-07-15, accepted on 2015-09-03

Keywords: Elections, India, Criminals, Parties, Regions

Malte Pehl is Assistant Professor of International Studies at the College of Charleston in South Carolina, USA, specializing in South Asian and comparative politics.

* The research for this article benefited from financial support from the School of Languages, Cultures and World Affairs and from a faculty research and development grant awarded by the College of Charleston. The author is grateful to the Centre for Policy Research and to the University of Pennsylvania Institute for the Advanced Study of India for visiting fellowships which aided the research, to the Association for Democratic Reforms for access to data and to the two reviewers for their helpful comments.