

**Panel 27:** Contextualizing 'Political Society': Some Critical Empirical Perspectives

**Conveners:** Radhika Govinda, University of Cambridge, UK  
Tariq Thachil, Cornell University, USA

**Abstract:** The concept of 'political society' is as contested as it is popular among those in the academic community doing research on civil society, state, citizenship and the poor and marginalised. It is said to represent the range of institutions and actors, which mediate and channel the relationships between civil society and the state. There are strong opinions on the theoretical validity of the concept: some scholars insist on its explanatory potential while others question its analytic utility. This panel invites papers from scholars who critically engage with this concept in their empirical research on South Asia, in general, and India, in particular.

The panel will engage with the concept from different theoretical perspectives and research traditions. However rather than critique the concept abstractly, all of the authors will attempt to analyze 'political society' inductively through close observation of different local political contexts in India, ranging from Dalit women's activism and politics in Uttar Pradesh, to subaltern Hindu nationalism in Chhattisgarh. In doing so, the authors will address a set of related questions: Whom or what does 'political society' consist of? To what degree is the concept institutionalized into political praxis and does its meaning change across specific local contexts? Does the concept resonate among poor and marginalised communities – do they see significant differences between what they can achieve as part of political society compared with the sphere of civil society? Is the concept of 'political society' even deserving of a distinct analytic category?

**Contact:** Radhika Govinda: [radhika.govinda@gmail.com](mailto:radhika.govinda@gmail.com)  
Tariq Thachil: [tariq.thachil@gmail.com](mailto:tariq.thachil@gmail.com)