The Pursuit of Social Welfare
citizen claim-making in rural india

By GABRIELLE KRUKS-WISNER

Who makes claims on the state for social welfare, and how and why do they do so? This article examines these dynamics in the rural Indian context, observing that citizens living in the same local communities differ dramatically in their approaches to the state. The author develops a theory to explain these varied patterns of action and inaction, arguing that citizen claim-making is best understood as a product of exposure to people and places beyond the immediate community and locality. This social and spatial exposure builds citizens’ encounters with, knowledge of, and linkages to the state. This in turn develops their aspirations toward the state and their capabilities for state-targeted action. The author tests the theory in rural Rajasthan, drawing on a combination of original survey data and qualitative interviews. She finds that those who traverse boundaries of caste, neighborhood, and village are more likely to make claims on the state, and that they do so through broader repertoires of action than those who are more constrained by the same boundaries. The article concludes by considering the extensions and limitations of the theory and the role of the state itself in establishing the terrain for citizen action.

Contributor Information

Gabrielle Kruks-Wisner is an assistant professor of politics and global studies at the University of Virginia. Her research examines citizen-state relations and social welfare provision. Her book, *Claiming the State: Active Citizenship and Social Welfare in Rural India*, will be published in 2018. She is currently engaged in work that builds on this study of claim-making and examines strategic interventions aimed at strengthening citizen voice and increasing official accountability in public service provision. She can be reached at gkk5x@virgina.edu.