South Asia in World Politics
Working Group
ISA Annual Convention, Baltimore 2017

Sponsored by: South Asia in World Politics (SAWP)
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Objective:
SAWP is a new section. As organizers, we hope that the working group will help identify and engage a wide range of scholars in thematic discussions that will cut across methodologies and theoretical perspectives. The working group seeks to pursue two of the section’s purposes outlined in the charter: “encourage research on the international engagements” of South Asian states and non-state actors as well as “facilitate the development of vigorous networks of communication and research among scholars of South Asia.”

Overview:
The theme of the 2017 conference is “Understanding Change in World Politics.” This working group is built on the premise that South Asia offers an excellent venue for understanding change. As one of the fastest-growing regions with over a fifth of the world’s population, South Asia offers the following diversity: a major power, two nuclear-armed neighbors, several fragile states, the largest working age population, a quarter of the world’s middle class, the largest number of poor. According to the World Bank, with the right policies, the region “has the potential to change world poverty.” As a region with a largely common colonial legacy, South Asia offers an opportunity to understand the effect of shared history on foreign policy. The region is also one of the least integrated, both politically and economically. Additionally, the United States’ pivot to Asia and China’s One Belt One Road initiative raise important questions regarding competition, rivalry and cooperation in the region.

This working group seeks to understand the politics and economics of international relations in the region. Several scholars of international relations have argued that IR as a field can benefit from marrying in-depth study of regions and countries, using methods preferred by scholars of comparative politics, with theories of international relations. The study of South Asian politics and international relations is beset by a lack of conversation between IR theorists and comparativists. The working group is designed to offer a space for bridging this gap, among others and seeks to do so by involving scholars whose work cuts across worldviews and methodologies. The workshop has the following objectives: 1) identify the strengths and weaknesses of various theoretical and methodological approaches to studying the region; 2) use those critical lenses to address the challenges and opportunities associated with regional stability, global governance, economic development within the region and connections with the world beyond; 3) investigate the relation between domestic economic and political development and foreign policy and engagement with global institutions and norms; 4) examine the potential for cooperation among the states in the region, taking into account extant conflicts and great power competition.