

# **Ethnicity, Nation, Nationalism**

Comparative Perspectives on Democracy and Development

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# From modern states to nation-states

- The once revolutionary template of political legitimacy— self-rule in the name of a nation of equal citizens—is now almost universally adopted
- Empires have dissolved, theocracies have been dethroned, and only a handful of countries, mostly in the Middle East, are still governed as absolutist monarchies
- Why did modern states—once they emerged out of the dynamics of war-making, bureaucratic centralization, and increasing taxation—become nation-states?

# Nationalism as the tool of state legitimacy

- **E. Gellner:** nationalism is a doctrine that claims that national and state units should be congruent
- there are many theories attempting to explain the rise of nations and nationalism
- it is a matter of empirical investigation what theory explains the rise of modern nation-states
- and thus has an explanatory power beyond the European context

# E. Gellner (1983)

- For an advanced, industrialized economy to work, the population must have shared skills to work as bureaucrats, as administrators, as clerks etc.
- Shared culture is required if the state is to function effectively
- Therefore, education system is always heavily involved in the process of cultural homogenization
- And linguistic too where necessary e.g., Eugen Weber's *Peasants into Frenchmen* (1976)

# E. Gellner (1983)

- nationalism and the nation-state are direct consequences of a shift from agricultural to industrial society
- the new economic system requires a mobile and flexible workforce
- a rationalized standardized education in a common language provides workers with the skills to shift from job to job and communicate effectively with others
- the educational apparatus of a nation-state eventually provides the new, standardized, and homogenized culture

# E.Gellner (1983)

- however, modernization and industrialization are spreading unevenly, affecting each region differently
- rural inhabitants move to industrialized centers, where their prospects remain limited if their language and culture do not correspond to the center's high culture
- resentment fed into nationalism may lead to an alternative project of high culture and possibly to creation of new nation-states (separatism)
- a similar process unfolded in the colonial world, where skin color was associated with unequal power, paving the way for anti-colonial nationalisms

# M. Hechter (2000)

- a difference between the state-building nationalism (e.g. France) and secessionist/peripheral nationalism (e.g. Austria-Hungary)
- state elites gradually homogenized the population and developed an assimilatory nationalism to legitimize their rule
- nationalist mobilization by peripheral elites who resented being governed by ethnic others and sought to reestablish self-rule

# B. Anderson (1991)

- A nation is a community: socially constructed and imagined
- An imagined political community that is both limited and sovereign
- **Imagined**: members cannot all know each other
- **Limited**: no nation encompasses all of mankind
- **Sovereign**: nations emerged during the Enlightenment and strive for freedom
- **Community**: people are connected with brotherhood



## B. Anderson (1991)

- the rise of “print capitalism” enabled literacy in vernacular languages
- the emerging reading public shared a narrative cosmos and *imagined itself* as a national community of common origin and future political destiny
- newspapers and novels in a near full literacy context led to **imagined communities**
- Low-level colonial administrators recruited from the local population could not aspire to positions above the provincial levels:
- confined to the provincial bureaucratic space, they laid the groundwork for imagining the nation along provincial (rather than linguistic) lines

## **B. Anderson (1991)**

- because the nation cannot be remembered, “it must be narrated” (p. 204)
- this becomes one of the important functions of education and of schools, the rendering of a particular narration as valid, reasonable, and true
- combined with other narrators (religion, popular media), schools are a discursive site where the public is “continuously reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life” (p. 35-36)
- the nation then emerges as something reified, and schools play a large role in this reification

# L. Greenfeld (1992)

- it is not deep-seated socioeconomic factors, but rather **dynamic** variables, that play the key role in spreading the nation-state as a universal norm of state form
- adoption of nationalist ideologies is the result of an **imitation process** through which a variety of political movements across the world copy from each other
- the imitation process proceeds along established networks of political and cultural relations
- TUR and JAP (GER), AFR (FRA a BRIT), Kurds a Arabs (TUR) etc.

# Michael Billig: Banal (Everyday) Nationalism

- When we study nationalism, we tend to think in terms of independence struggles for new states or extremism
- Nationalism is presented as “an extraordinary, emotional mood striking at extraordinary times”
- in established western democracies (1995) nationalism was thought to exist on the margins of political life
- For Billig, this overlooks the nationalism of the western nation-states
- Billig claims that nations are reproduced daily:

# Michael Billig: Banal (Everyday) Nationalism

- national identity in established nations is remembered because it is embedded in **routines of life**, which constantly remind, or “flag”, nationhood...these are so numerous, and they are such familiar part of the social environment that they operate mindlessly” (p. 38)
- these flags “are given hardly a second glance from day to day; they are unwaved, unsaluted, unnoticed”
- this is not a conscious activity: it differs from the collective remembering of a commemoration
- the remembering is mindless, occurring as other activities are being consciously engaged in

# Michael Billig: Banal (Everyday) Nationalism

- Nationalism, far from being an intermittent mood in established nations, is the endemic condition
- banality is not synonymous with harmlessness
- irrationality and violence of nationalism is often projected onto others
- “we” live in a reasonable world where none of that matters, “they” are the ones infected by that fiery mindless nationalism
- once a nation is established, it depends for its continuous existence upon a collective amnesia: if we think all the time about the exclusion and violence involved in the nation-making, could the nation ever function as a moral community?

# Empirical tests

- Wimmer a Feinstein (2010): most theories have only a limited reach
- NO to Gellner: no general association between industrialization and nation-state formation (early nation-states in Latin America were created in a preindustrial environment, while the highly industrialized Soviet and Yugoslav provinces had to wait to accomplish nation-statehood)
- NO to Anderson: Territories that correspond to the boundaries of provinces or states are not more likely to become nation-states AND
- more literate societies are *less likely* to become nation-states

# Wimmer a Feinstein (2010)

- nationalists will be more successful if the center is weakened by wars
- imperial states that are powerful players in the international arena can more easily co-opt, control, or suppress nationalist movements and prevent the establishment of nation-states
- nation-states are created wherever a power shift allows nationalists to overthrow or absorb the established regime, quite independent of whether domestic modernization processes have readied a society for nation-building



# Wimmer a Feinstein (2010)

- such a power shift is more likely when nationalists have had ample **time to mobilize** the population and delegitimize the old regime or when the established regime is weakened by **wars**
- nationalists who struggle against an imperial center are at a disadvantage when the empire has considerable global military and economic power
- all this indicates the importance of **elite interactions** and configurations as well as the importance of **imitation** processes

# Identity

- (Hale 2004) is the set of points of personal reference on which people rely to navigate the social world they inhabit
- to make sense of social relationships that they encounter
- to discern their place in these constellations
- and to understand the opportunities for action in this context

# Ethnicity and its origins

- **primordialism:** there are clear-cut and enduring boundaries between groups;
- each has its particular constitutive features that do not change (cultures, traditions, histories, physical traits, language repertoires, religion, etc.);
- kinship relations are the critical element that holds each group together
- **constructivism:** the particular elements of culture or kinship is not defining feature of an ethnic group
- the mere fact that **boundaries** are perceived and persist is sufficient to produce different identities

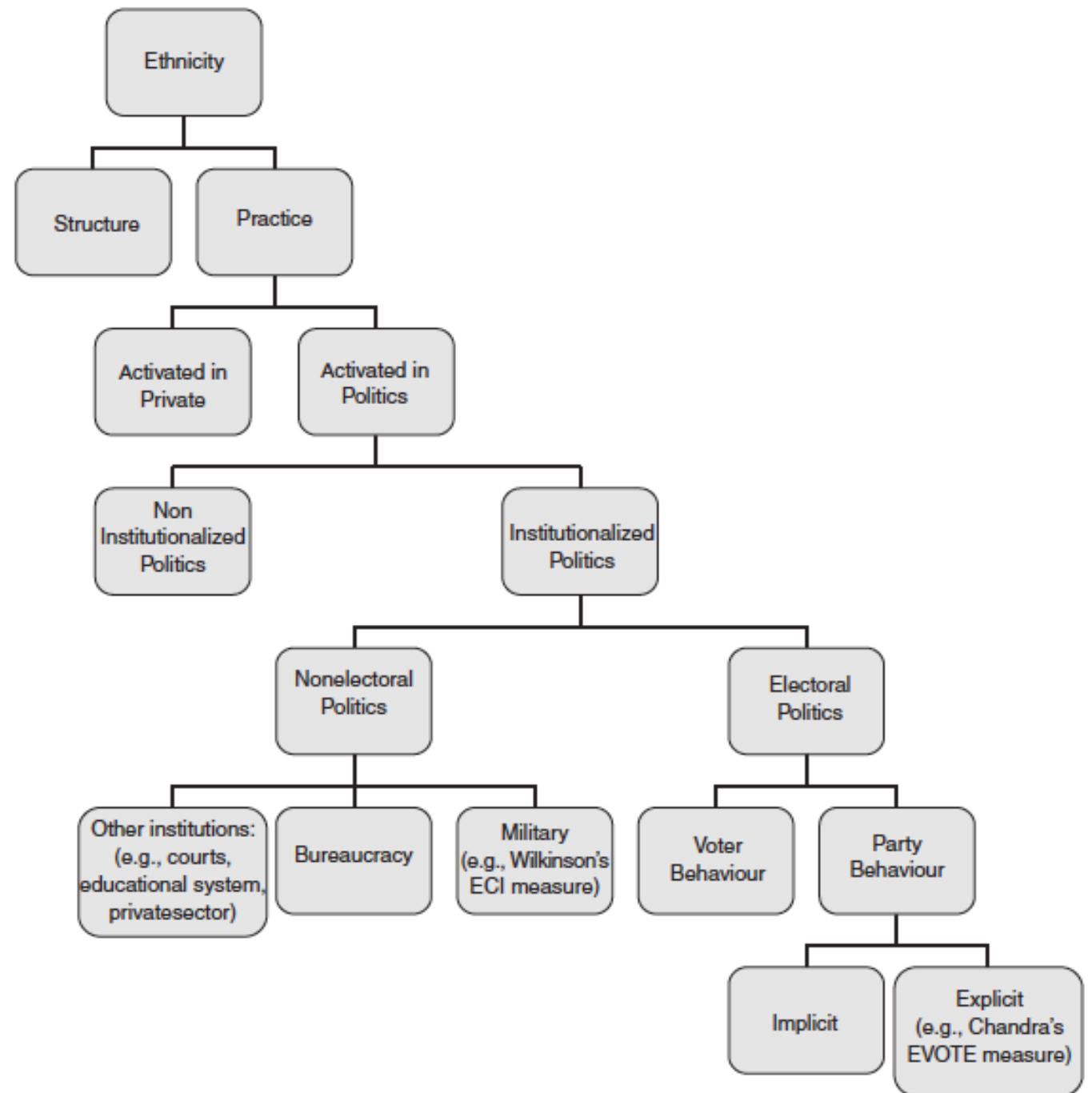
# Ethnicity and its origins

- mere assignment to a group is enough, under controlled conditions, to induce group-oriented behavior
- ethnicity is an important identity because:
  - (1) involves barriers to communication (language)
  - (2) (sometimes) involves physical differences
  - (3) 1. a 2. tend to be territorially concentrated
  - (4) symbols of ethnicity are shared by the whole community
  - (5) however, identity changes, and the meanings and identifications can be manipulated by elites and individual subjects

# Ethnicity and its origins

- ethnicity is one of the most frequently used concepts of political analysis
- Chandra a Wilkinson (2008): ethnic identity is an arbitrary subset of categories in which descent-based attributes are necessary for membership
- Ethnicity as an umbrella concept that includes identity categories associated with one/some of the following: religion, sect, language, dialect, tribe, clan, race, nationality, region, cast, physical difference
- Descent is crucial, but how to specify the rules of descent and which additional features distinguish ethnic identity (in addition to descent)?
- A **shared culture** most frequently associated with ethnic identity
- a difference between ethnic structure and ethnic practice:

- **structure** – static attributes linked to common descent, (e.g. language)
- **practice** – dynamic attributes, the act of using one or more identities embedded in this structure to guide behavior
- ethnic structure of a population is difficult to change in a short time but may change over time, since ethnic practice is based on the activated categories
- political institutions, job opportunities, social interactions etc. may trigger the process of change



Consider, for instance, a *woman* living in New York with attributes such as *dark skin, birth in Trinidad, and descent from parents of African origin*. In the short term, we can take these attributes as being fixed. If she has dark skin now, she is likely to have dark skin 10 years from now. Because these attributes are fixed in the short term, so is her nominal repertoire of descent-based categories.

This repertoire includes the categories West Indian, Black, Trinidadian, and so on, but it does not include the categories Asian or German, for which she does not have the requisite descent-based attributes.

But the categories that she activates from this fixed set can change, often quite rapidly. She may well switch back and forth between the identities Black, West Indian, Trinidadian, and others, depending on the incentives that she faces without any change in her underlying set of attributes.

# Consequences of National Identity

- three empirical patterns in modern democracies:
  - 1. national identification is more common among the poor than among the rich
  - 2. national identification tends to reduce support for redistribution
  - 3. across democracies there is a strong negative relationship between the prevalence of national identification and the level of redistribution
- ! individual economic preferences also shaped by collective identities!



# Shayo: Identification with groups

- 1. people are more likely to categorize themselves as members of a group the more “similar” they are to the other members of that group
- 2. people tend to identify more with high-status groups than with low status groups
- these factors are the same two factors that affect individual behavior under identification

# Ethnic and Class Identities

- two types of equilibria may emerge:
- 1. the members of the lower class, who always constitute a majority, identify with their class (and vote for a relatively high level of redistribution)
- 2. members of the lower class think of themselves more as members of the nation as a whole than as members of a low-status part of it (they are less concerned with income redistribution and vote for a lower level of redistribution than they would under class identity)
- since these are equilibria, they change only under external pressures (RatChoice)

# Ethnic and Class Identities

- a threat to national security may lead to conviction that “we all are threatened”, both the rich and the poor
- less attention is paid to class belonging and there is less support for taxation and redistribution
- conversely, in situations of natural disasters, due to which lower classes are disproportionately suffering, unaffected lower-class people may more identify with these people and with their demands for more redistribution

# Ethnic and Class Identities

- our model explains the situation in the US where lower classes tend to identify more with the nation and less support redistribution
- it also explains well why many voters of Social Democracy in Western Europe shifted their support to radical anti-immigrant right :
- Immigration of foreign workers affects primarily the composition of the poorer segments of society
- consequently, identifying oneself as part of the working class is not as self-evident for the native workers as it used to be (support for general interest redistribution declines)