

## BOOK REVIEW

**Varieties of nationalism: communities, narratives, identities**, by Harris Mylonas and Maya Tudor, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2023, vi + 83 pp., \$22.00 (paperback), ISBN 9781108972925

In this short but intriguing and much-needed book, Harris Mylonas and Maya Tudor provide a guide and framework for how to conduct rigorous comparative and cumulative research into the various consequences of nationalism through time and across countries. Noting that the nationalism scholarship lacks foremost the conceptual clarity that characterizes other fields of comparative study like democratization (rather surprisingly given nationalism's enduring relevance around the world), the authors systematically break down the concept of nationalism into the five most significant dimensions identified in the literature – “elite and popular fragmentation of national communities; ascriptiveness and thickness of national narratives; and salience of national identities” (11) – and review some of the influential works in the literature that causally link each of these dimensions with a diverse range of outcomes such as regime type, refugee policies, state capacity, political stability and others. They conclude by encouraging scholars to explicitly situate their research puzzle along one of the five identified dimensions of nationalism (62) and to define and operationalize that dimension(s) “in a clear, consistent manner” (14). Only in this way, the authors contend, can meaningful comparative and cumulative knowledge in the nationalism scholarship be built.

This book definitely constitutes a milestone in the field of nationalism studies in terms of its overall goal of establishing a systematic comparative research basis for the scholarship, in terms of identifying and addressing the five main problems therein and in terms of the comprehensiveness of the nationalism works reviewed. There are, nonetheless, a few points that I would like to elaborate on.

First, I notice a discrepancy in the length of discussion of the five identified dimensions of nationalism. The section on elite fragmentation (31–38) is the most well-explained and the richest in details and examples from different time periods and countries/regional contexts, whereas the discussion on the thickness of national narratives (47–49) is less developed and the shortest (only two pages). While this might be in part due to the relative paucity of works investigating the consequences of this specific dimension of nationalism, I think the authors should still have put forward more concrete examples from different contexts to better illustrate the difference between thin and thick national narratives. The difference gets confusing somehow when the authors describe the Soviet Union's national narrative with “high symbolic thickness” (49), while elsewhere in the book they refer to the nationalism of a structurally similar multinational federation – Yugoslavia – as “thinly defined” (13).


Second, referring again to the dimension of elite fragmentation, it is not entirely clear who is included in the concept of “elites” here. The authors define the elite fragmentation dimension as “the degree of agreement among the main political elites ... within a territory or movement, over the definition of the nation” (30; also 37). Yet, what constitutes the “main political elites” in a country? Does it include only the elites from the same ethnic group or from different ethnic groups as well? For some cases like the U.S. one discussed in the book, it is pretty much straightforward that elites refers to the Whites sharing the same language, culture and religion. But in other cases that are mentioned such as Pakistan, India and Belgium, the “main political elites” refers to different language-speaking groups that loosely identify with a common religion. What about potential cleavages *within* the Punjabi-speaking and/or Bengali-speaking Muslim elites in Pakistan, for example? Does the framework provided by the authors in this dimension allow for multiple cleavages within the same country, both inter- and intra-ethnic? This brings another related point on this issue. It would have been better perhaps if the authors had drawn a clear distinction between ethnic (involving culture/language) and non-ethnic cleavages (involving class and religion) among elites. This would be helpful not only for comparing the consequences that each type of cleavage has for different outcomes but also in terms of discussing cases in which elites within the same country may be united on one dimension but fragmented on another, and the potential consequences this leads to. Indeed, a recent influential work by Zeynep Bulutgil (not discussed in the book) shows how non-ethnic cleavages among otherwise mono-ethnic elites can constrain ethnic cleansing.

Last but not least, it is tempting to ask whether elite fragmentation generates more positive or negative outcomes. In the book, authors provide more examples of negative outcomes (such as authoritarianism, political instability, racist political/social orders) and, among others, hypothesize that “nationalisms characterized by deep and enduring elite and popular fragmentations are unlikely to thrive” while those “with elite and popular cohesion are more likely to be able to solve important collective action problems” (62–63). However, it is being empirically established that nationhood cleavages among elites counterintuitively might provide an important opportunity space for more positive outcomes as well. The authors discuss only one example of this phenomenon in the book, Oxana Shevel’s work on how elite fragmentation in post-communist eastern European countries is more likely to generate non-discriminatory refugee policies (37). In a recent work not discussed in the book, Aktürk and Lika show how nationhood cleavage in some Balkan countries facilitates a higher level of ethno-linguistic recognition for minorities in those states while nationhood cohesion makes such an outcome less likely.

All in all, *Varieties of Nationalism* is bound to become a major reference point for the nationalism scholarship. It will provide the basis for a comparative and cumulative research agenda. It definitely is a must-read not only for comparative political scientists but also for other social scientists with an interest on nationalism.

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2024.2302856>

