



Nations, States, and Violence

By David D. Laitin

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Nations, States, and Violence By David D. Laitin

Nations, States, and Violence presents a revisionist view of the sources of nationalism, the relationship of the nation to culture, and the implications of nationalism and cultural heterogeneity for the future of the nation-state. It accepts the now-standard view that national identities are not inherited traits but constructed communities in order to serve political ends. But the resulting national identities do not emerge from some metaphorical plebiscite as had been suggested by some; rather they result from efforts by people to coordinate their identities with people who share at least some cultural traits with them. Coordination leads to powerful social and cultural ties that are hard to unravel, and this explains the persistence of national identities.

Understood as the result of coordination dynamics, the implications of national homogeneity and heterogeneity are explored. The book shows that national heterogeneity is not, as it is sometimes accused of being, a source of hatred and violence. Nonetheless, there are advantages to homogeneity for the production of public goods and economic growth. Whatever the positive implications of homogeneity, the book shows that in the current world, classic nation-states are defunct. Heterogeneity is proliferating not only due to migration but also because small groups in many states once thought to be homogeneous are coordinating to demand national recognition. With the prohibitive costs of eliminating cultural heterogeneity, citizens and leaders need to learn how best to manage, or even take advantage of, national diversity within their countries. Management of diversity demands that we understand the coordination aspects of national heterogeneity, a perspective that this book provides.

In addition to providing a powerful theory of coordination and cultural diversity, the book provides a host of engaging vignettes of Somalia, Spain, Estonia, and Nigeria, where the author has conducted original field research. The result is a book where theory is combined with interpretations of current issues on nationalism, economic growth, and ethnic violence.

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Editorial Review

Review

"In this provocative little book, a Stanford political scientist presents an intriguing account of nationalism and its implications for conflict and cooperation."--*Foreign Affairs*

"Since the late 1970s, David L. Laitin has published important work on political identity, language choice and change, and ethnonational conflict. Here he draws together themes from that work."--*International History Review*

About the Author

David D. Laitin was born in Brooklyn, New York. He received his Ph.D. at UC Berkeley, working under the direction of Ernst Haas and Hanna Pitkin. As a student of comparative politics, he has conducted field research in Somalia, Yorubaland, Catalonia and Estonia . His books include *Politics, Language and Thought: The Somali Experience*, *Hegemony and Culture: Politics and Religious Change Among the Yoruba*, and *Identity in Formation: The Russian-Speaking Populations in the Near Abroad*.

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