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Marcus Macauley

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Book Review

Identities, Trust, and Cohesion in Federal Systems: Public Perspectives

Jack JEDWAB and John KINCAID (eds.).
McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018, 291 pages

By Marcus Macauley

Simon Fraser University

In this edited volume, editors Jack Jedwab and John Kincaid bring together eight case studies of federal systems (Canada, Spain, Belgium, Switzerland, the United States, Mexico, Australia, and Germany) to examine the links between individual identities, perceptions of trust in governments, political actors and institutions, and diverse measures of federal cohesion. Delving into unique circumstances for each case under investigation, the text provides a wealth of contextual knowledge relevant to understanding causal factors and mechanisms related to political phenomena in each federal jurisdiction. The book offers several in-depth insights related to our understanding of federal systems, along with evidence to enhance prominent ongoing debates on the broader implications of federalism. Discussions on the interactions between public preferences and salient characteristics of federalism, such as devolution, decentralization, and subnational institutions, will be appreciated by institutionalists and public opinion scholars alike. Though comparative scholars and students of identity politics may find much to be desired in terms of cross-case implications and theoretical depth.

All chapters within the text make use of available public opinion data related to trust and identity to buttress central arguments, though few commonalities exist among methodological approaches employed for each case. Methods here range from cross-sectional survey observations to comparative opinion poll analysis to multi-time point panel and cross-case survey observations. Variation in research designs and methodological choices lead to intriguingly diverse findings and provide avenues for further comparative research.

That said, while findings for each case are compelling in their own respect, resolving key similarities and consistencies between case studies is largely left up to the reader despite attempts by the editors to identify overarching themes among studies in the introductory chapter of the text.

In weighing the combined implications of the eight case studies, Jedwab and Kincaid suggest that greater systematic comparative research remains necessary to resolve debates regarding the effects of federal institutional arrangements on perceived territorial attachments and expressions of trust in political actors and institutions. As example, evidence from Belgium and Canada suggest that federal decentralization can lead to greater attachment to regional identities, while conversely similar decentralization efforts in Spain do not appear to diminish individual attachment to national identities. Likewise, it is unclear whether broad trust in governing institutions is a requirement for greater federal cohesion. In the US, low levels of trust of government does not appear to be detrimental to federal cohesion, whereas in Switzerland high levels of trust correspond with high levels of satisfaction with the federal government. Here, explanations for variations in outcomes in differing contexts are argued to stem from factors unique to federal systems. However, in the absence of comparative evidence from non-federal systems throughout the text, it is difficult to identify explanatory variables inherent to federal jurisdictions.

Despite apparent variations in methods and research designs for each case study, one of the text's central concepts of *identity* is held relatively constant throughout. Here, identity is defined as a measure of expressed comparative attachment either to supranational, national or subnational (province, state, canton, or cities) territorial institutions or governments. Varying levels of attachment along these lines is argued to possess explanatory qualities for understanding individual and aggregate expressions of trust in political institutions and actors and is indicative of state-level indicators of cohesion in federal systems. That said, while this simplified definition of identity is useful for quantification and cross-case comparison, it fails to capture the complexity of personal identity formation, expression, and meaningful attachments to socially relevant cleavages within societies. Research in the sub-fields of identity politics and political psychology often make use of more nuanced measures of social and political identities.

Indeed, seminal political research on measurements of psychological traits (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Enos, 2017), group-based attachments (Brewer, 1999; Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960), and ingroup/outgroup differentiation (Allport, 1954; Posner, 2004; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) show that competing social identities help us understand motivating factors behind political behaviours and broader phenomena. Likewise, measurements of intersecting identities have proven exceedingly useful for unpacking salient individual identities in political contexts (Crenshaw, 1991;

Hancock, 2016). As such, this present text under review misses an opportunity to make use of more theoretically rich conceptualizations of identity that would not only advance literature within the sub-fields of political psychology and identity politics, but would also further bridge substantial gaps in knowledge, linking personal identities and the broad-ranging effects of institutional arrangements. To be fair, Kincaid and Cole make note of varying conceptualizations of identity and community attachments in their discussion of identities and trust in the US case (Chapter 6), however such competing measurements are not empirically examined anywhere in the text.

In conclusion, this collection of diverse case studies presents several interesting perspectives that connect public opinion trends with institutional peculiarities found in federal systems. The strength of the edited volume can be found in the in-depth nature of each case study and the refreshing discussions on the dynamic relationships between public preferences and institutional characteristics in each country. The results of the case studies largely stand alone however, as each employs a unique research method, and few studies make use of cross-case designs (and none with comparisons to non-federal systems). Further, a more nuanced approach to the conceptualization of individual identity and perceived attachments would likely strengthen micro-level theories utilized in the text. That said, the text is a welcome contribution to the study of federalism, as well as a thought-provoking and insightful read.

Marcus Macauley
mjm6@sfu.ca

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